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DAHOMY

An Ancient West African Kingdom

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME ONE

By MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS

THE AMERICAN NEGRO, a Study in Racial Crossing (A. A. Knopf)

THE ANTHROPOMETRY OF THE AMERICAN NEGRO
(Columbia Univ. Press)

LIFE IN A HAITIAN VALLEY (A. A. Knopf)

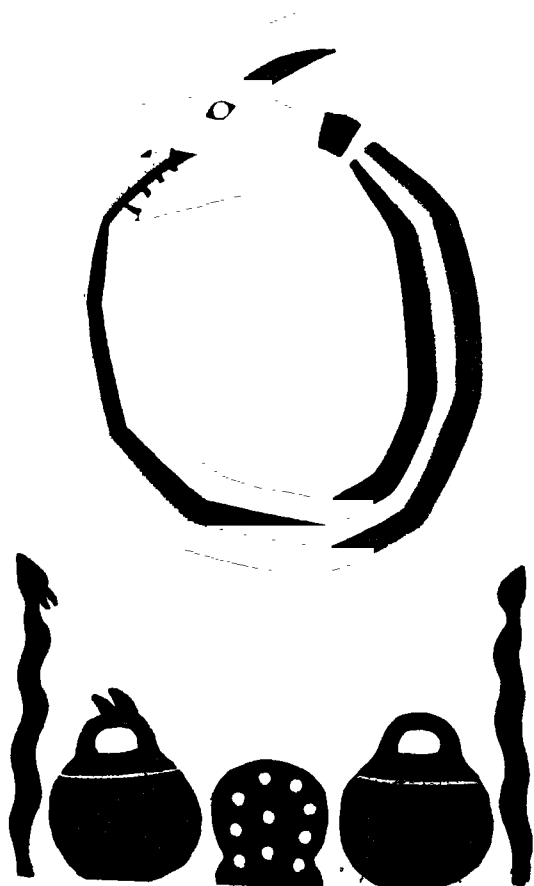
ACCULTURATION, the Study of Culture Contact (J. J. Augustin)

By MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS and FRANCES S. HERSKOVITS

REBEL DESTINY, Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana (Whittlesey House)

AN OUTLINE OF DAHOMEAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF
(American Anthropological Ass'n.)

SURINAME FOLKLORE (Columbia Univ. Press)



Aido Hwedo, with cult-objects used in the worship of Da, as
represented in appliqué cloth.

Dahomey

AN ANCIENT WEST AFRICAN KINGDOM

MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS

VOLUME I

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PREFACE

This study of native life in Dahomey has a dual purpose. In common with all works of its kind, it aims at extending our knowledge of primitive life in general, and of the culture of the region described in particular. In addition, it is intended to provide materials for those students of New World Negro culture who wish to know more fully the mode of life of the peoples from whom were drawn the ancestors of the Negroes who today inhabit the Americas.

Dahomey is of importance from both these points of view. For the ethnologist, it not only represents a West African civilisation that has been almost less affected than any other by the circumstances of European control, but it is also a culture wherein the patterns of verbalisation of belief and practice are so deeply rooted that many new leads suggest themselves for the analysis of parallel institutions among other folk of the West Coast. Several such institutions which, made explicit by the Dahomean tradition of objectification, may serve to clarify some of the hitherto undescribed interrelations and meanings in West African culture, can be named here.

In the field of economic life, the functioning of cooperative effort in numerous phases of production and the taxation policy of the native kingdom, may be cited. Examples in the field of social organisation are the institution of the best friend, which places in relief a relationship hitherto almost entirely ignored by students of primitive society; the explanation of concepts underlying West African totemism; the questions raised as to the secret societies in this region; and the importance of multiple forms of marriage. In religion the significance of the so-called "small-pox cult" and its relation to the worship of the Earth gods can be mentioned; together with the re-phrasing of well-worn explanations of serpent-worship; the exposition of the multiple soul concept that has been and remains so difficult a problem in West African ethnology; the nature of the divine trickster; and the common sanctions that make for the close interrelation that exists between magic and other forms of supernatural belief. Finally, in the field of art, the position of the artist in Dahomey offers much to those con-

cerned with the place of creative effort in a society where highly developed patterns of conformity place many obstacles in the way of individualistic expression.

For those interested in the background of New World Negroes, the importance of Dahomean culture derives from its situation at the very center of the long coastal belt where the most intensive slaving operations were carried on. Whydah figures prominently in the history of the early slave trade, but that its rôle as a point of export did not mean that it was merely a port from which slaves brought from the far interior were shipped is to be seen in the degree to which the culture of Dahomey lives on today in Haiti, the Guianas, and elsewhere in the New World. Unfortunately, the native cultures of West Africa have far too often been written of in a deprecatory tone, so that the "savage" African background has become stereotyped in references to the ancestral traditions of the Negro peoples of the Americas to a degree that it has attained almost universal currency in the United States, at least, and is today accepted by Negroes no less than by Whites. But a consideration of this Dahomean culture, with its excellence in technology and art, its complex political and social structure, its profoundly integrated world-view and its mythology rich in elaborate conceptualisation, may prove of help toward a truer and more realistic view of how far removed from the popular idea is the actuality of the cultural heritage of the New World Negro.

Research in the field was carried on by Mrs. Herskovits and myself from March to August, 1931. Most of this period was spent in Abomey, the capital of the native kingdom and, as stated in the text, the material presented here refers to Abomey custom only unless specified to the contrary. Four weeks of the available time were spent in Allada and Whydah, which were selected as the most advantageous centers both for checking data and for noting variations within the culture. The method employed was one which I have already described:

"In the field, the procedure followed in earlier investigations was continued; a house was found . . . where it was possible to settle down and quietly observe life as it drifted past the door. A number of acquaintances became habitual visitors, and these, together with others whose services as interpreters were needed . . . constituted those to whom questions were referred for clarification. Agreement on all points . . . was by no means invariably found, but soundness of method in the study of culture must recognize that there are no 'correct' answers to questions of custom; and that the acceptance of the fact of individual differences of behavior and point of view within the general frame-

work of a given set of traditions is the only valid approach to the realities of human civilization."¹

Because this research had the approval of the French Colonial Office (as a result of the representations made in its behalf by M. Henri Labouret and the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, to whom it is a pleasure to express my gratitude), it was possible to live in the native city, where with the exception of a few friendly visits with the French officials at the Residency a mile or more away, our contacts were exclusively with the natives. Our house, close to the market-place, had the two-fold advantage of being near enough to the center of activities to permit of easy access to happenings of interest, while at the same time, because it was of the unusual *étage* or two-storied kind, it afforded privacy for long discussions with chiefs and commoners and descendants of slaves, and with priests and laymen. The well in our courtyard also brought beneath our windows groups of women and children, and on market days in particular the courtyard was a place of great activity.

By foregoing the greater ease in living that would have been afforded by a trained household staff recruited on the coast, we profited from the daily and seemingly casual verification of data our Abomey men could give, while little kindnesses led to friendships with their families that opened other doors into the life of the city. A point of significance was the reassurance it was possible to give concerning the disinterestedness of the scientific ends sought in this work, since it soon became clear to the natives that the study was being conducted in the interest of neither the Church nor of the Colonial Administration. Whatever in this presentation reveals confidence in the integrity of the ethnographer, however, must in the final analysis be credited to the fascination that the Negro cultures of Dutch Guiana held for the Dahomeans, whatever their rank.

In view of the realities of political and social life in Abomey today, I have concluded it to be in the best interests of those who gave me information not to name any of them here, but to classify them and describe a few of the most important in anonymous terms. In addition to those numerous persons whose names I do not know, since my contacts with them were of the casual sort inevitable when one is living in a populous center, I count twenty-six in Abomey, twelve in Allada, and five in Whydah who contributed significantly to the body of data presented in these volumes. The element of caste being as

¹ Herskovits, M. J. (VI), p. 321; see also the entire section pp. 320-323.

basic as it is, it was essential first to establish rapport with members of the native royal family, and practically all branches of the family of Glele were visited. Ceremonies were witnessed at the compounds of most of these chiefs; as is to be seen from the pages that follow, the Behanzin family were especially cooperative.

My principal interpreter in Abomey was as interesting for the personality conflicts that marked his life as for his philosophical insight into the values of his own culture. Unstable and emotional though he was, when his imagination was fired by the "Dahomey" of the Guiana bush, he could draw tellingly on the advantages of his social position to bring to us significant information, and would work with a patience and tenacity of purpose that might have taxed a more phlegmatic person. My chief interpreter in Allada was of an opposite type—a steady, conscientious man, though also one who showed insight, and had the imagination to see the possibilities of a study which probed into the beliefs and behavior of his people so as to reveal to him much of what he had hitherto taken for granted. Through him and those whom he brought to our house it was possible to review Abomey materials even while studying the variance of Allada custom from that in the Dahomean center to the north where we had previously worked.

Besides our household staff, the other informants comprised two groups; one consisting of specialists—artisans, diviners, and priests—brought by our interpreters to furnish information on whatever points were under discussion, or visited at their homes; the other of individuals drawn from the body of commoners and supplied us by members of our household to discuss these same matters from a more humble point of view. We found the middle-class diviner of one of these members of our household perhaps the most valuable of this second group; in all likelihood because knowing we were in communication with the renowned diviners of Dahomey, he was stimulated to show his own grasp of his profession. Wherever possible the points of view of priests, devotees and laymen were sought on religious questions, while in matters of social organisation and political life, opinions and attitudes of the chiefly families, commoners and descendants of slaves were gathered. In order to obtain information from women, it was necessary because of the difficulty of finding those who could speak French to conduct work initially with a group of four. Two of them, hospital nurses, were interpreters, the other two were natives of Abomey. As the work developed and confidence was established, these four often

came individually of their own volition to amplify information, or to give an answer to what had earlier been said to be unknown. Later still, and most satisfactorily, the women from the families of our household staff were drawn upon to add to and verify the data gathered, to clarify attitudes, and to explore new fields.

Since the objective of this research was to obtain a rounded portrayal of the patterns of Dahomean culture, as much care was had to include accounts of occurrences in ordinary life and of ceremonial significance which because of the annual cycle did not fall within the period of field-work, as was taken to observe those that were to be witnessed. The same principle was followed with those happenings in the lives of individuals that are more or less dependent on chance as to whether they are encountered by the ethnographer. A birth, a marriage, a death or a private ceremony taking place in the home of a friend can easily be visited without introducing any artificiality into a situation that is often charged with intense emotion. But because of the distortion that occurs when a stranger invades rites of this sort from motives that, whatever their scientific nature, can to native eyes only appear as indefensible curiosity, it was a rule rigidly adhered to during this field-work never to attend a private rite or a public ceremony without an invitation from the person in charge, whether he was the humble head of a small compound or the high-priest of one of the great cult groups. What was witnessed and what was not will be readily discerned in the pages that follow.

Fɔ̌, the language of Dahomey, is of the first order of difficulty, both as to phonetic structure and grammatical form and, like other languages of the region, its complexities are enhanced by its tonal values. It would, of course, have been of great advantage to have had an adequate command of Fɔ̌, but as it would be a matter of years to be able to carry on ethnographic work in it, only the elementary phrases of everyday intercourse were learned. This does not mean that a knowledge of a native language is a *sine qua non* in the study of all problems bearing on primitive cultures. By the use of interpreters and of well recognized and tested techniques, it is possible to obtain the information needed to discover, describe and understand the institutions of a people, and it is such techniques that have been employed in this study. The text materials, however, are presented with a *caveat* that they are subject to revision when a detailed study of Fɔ̌ is made.¹

¹ Fɔ̌ is related to Ewe, which has been studied above all by Professor D. Westermann. It is not, however, Ewe; and the statements that one encounters to

That a study of five months' duration could yield the material it did is a tribute to the richness of Dahomean culture. Yet even a culture of this richness would not have yielded so much had the work not been done by two persons rather than one, who had had field experience in cultures related to that with which they were in this case concerned. The advantage of having a field-team of persons of both sexes is obvious, for the line of sex division is primary and, in most primitive societies, the most difficult one to cross. Certainly Dahomean women would have discussed sex education with no man as they did with Mrs. Herskovits, just as Dahomean men would not have gone over comparable ground with a woman. That it was possible to get fact and folklore of the knowledge each sex has of the customs appertaining to its own proper education for marriage, and the beliefs of each concerning the education given members of the opposite sex, is due solely to the fact that one member of the field-party was a man, and one a woman. The advantages that accrue with each additional field-trip among peoples whose cultures are related are too numerous and well recognized to need more than mention; not so well understood is the gain when more than one person works simultaneously among the same people. For in such cases there is a constant interchange of impressions and ideas concerning the work in hand that makes for a stimulus that the lone worker cannot obtain, and which materially enhances the use to which the actual time in the field can be put.

In writing up the data, care has been taken to draw on all possible sources to give a time perspective to the data gathered in the field, and I count it my good fortune that so many earlier travellers, explorers and officials have devoted their attention to Dahomey. For despite current controversies as to the desirability of employing or not employing an historical approach to the study of culture—or of a given culture—the fact remains that all relevant data must be drawn upon in work done within the frame of reference termed scientific; and it is for this reason that the writings of those who visited Dahomey before me have been combed for pertinent materials. Unlike many recent

to this effect, or to the effect that the Dahomeans speak a dialect of Ewe, are the result of a curious historical accident. The Ewe-speaking tribes are found in eastern Togoland, a former German colony, and since German scholars were most active in West African linguistic research, they gave to all related tongues the name of the tongue prevailing in this colony where they worked. However, since these Togoland tribes represent outposts of Dahomean civilisation, we have here the practice of calling the language of the larger group by the name of the smaller, as though, for example, it were to be said that French was a dialect of Norman, or German a dialect of Flemish.

anthropological monographs, the present work is purely descriptive. It is to be regarded as unfortunate that we have not held to an earlier tradition that dictated the separation in publication of ethnographic materials from ethnological controversies, leaving the former to be drawn on by all, irrespective of theoretical position, to document the problems in the study of culture that transcend materials from a single folk. It is to this earlier tradition that these volumes adhere, with but two or three minor exceptions where comparative data or theoretical considerations are needed to point a better comprehension of certain aspects of Dahomean culture itself.

The text of this book was completed in December, 1934; the delay in its appearance is due to the exigencies of arranging publication for a work of this character. In the meantime, the following *interim* papers, based on these data, have appeared:

"Population Statistics in the Kingdom of Dahomey." *Human Biology*, vol. iv (1932), pp. 252-261.

"Some Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology." *Africa*, vol. v (1932), pp. 266-296.

"A Footnote to the History of Negro Slaving" (with Frances S. Herskovits). *Opportunity*, vol. xi (1933), pp. 178-181.

"An Outline of Dahomean Religious Belief" (with Frances S. Herskovits). Memoir 41, American Anthropological Association, 1933.

"The Art of Dahomey: I—Brass-casting and Appliqué Cloths. II—Wood Carving" (with Frances S. Herskovits). *American Magazine of Art*, vol. xxvii (1934), pp. 67-76, 124-131.

"The Best Friend in Dahomey." *Negro Anthology* (Nancy Cunard, editor), London, 1934.

"A Note on 'Woman Marriage' in Dahomey." *Africa*, vol. x (1937), pp. 335-341.

Some of these papers came to the attention of M. Bernard Maupoil, of the French Colonial Service, who caused them to be translated and read to native informants. I am grateful to M. Maupoil for thus putting the data to this test. In the text, I have commented on certain of the points he makes in his letters to me.

While these volumes were in press, the Memoir by M. Hazoumé and the papers by M. Bertho and M. Kiti reached me. It has been possible to insert a few references to M. Hazoumé's book, though mechanical considerations prevented my noting all the points I would have noted had this interesting work been available earlier. For the same reason, it has been possible only to make one reference to M. Bertho's careful paper on the Dahomean divining cult, and one to the

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- b) "From time to time, young men clad in fine garments danced about the cleared space with a kind of trotting step...."

PLATE 34. 224-225

- a) "Two of the dancers, who wore chiefs' caps and were garbed in white, represented Dambada Hwedo, the ancient ancestors...."
b) "The principal variation ... was a group dance which glorified the conquests of the Dahomean Kings in which the ancestors had taken part...."

PLATE 35. 224-225

- a) One of the temples for the royal *txoxu* in Abomey.
b) Paintings on the wall of the temple for Zumadunu. (Cf. Le Herissé, plate XX).

PLATE 36. 224-225

Dancers for gods of various categories at a ceremony in honor of the Təhwíyó.

PLATE 37. 224-225

Thunder cult initiates dance for their Təhwíyó at a ceremony given by their sib.

PLATE 38. 240-241

- a) Scene within an Abomey compound, headquarters of the local Egu society. The masked figure, after being whipped by the initiates, is seen retreating through the doorway.
b) "Hunters of the night" in costume at Whydah.

PLATE 39. 240-241

Dahomean non-secret society banners.

PLATE 40. 272-273

- a) A Dahomean twin. Note the doll carried by this child, the image of its deceased twin.
b) Forcible feeding of a baby is resorted to if necessary.

PLATE 41. 272-273

A Fá cup with the design of a mother feeding her infant.

PLATE 42. 276-277

Appliqué cloth showing mother and twins, with the ceremonial objects of the twin cult.

PLATE 43. 288-289

- a) A pair of twins grown to maturity.
b) This macrocephalic boy is regarded as a *txoxu*, and is not ignored as he goes about asking for gifts.

PLATE 44. 288-289

- a) A group of Dahomean children.
b) A young girl helps her mother as she is able. Carrying clay from the pit to the work-place of the potter.

PLATE 45. 304-305

Front and rear views of a brass figure on which cicatrizations are represented.

PLATE 46.	304-305
Dahomean chiefs and some of their younger and more favored wives.	
PLATE 47.	384-385
a) The oldest son of a man recently dead, and members of the mourning family.	
b) Shaving the head of a mourner.	
PLATE 48.	384-385
a) The mourners salute the spirit of the dead.	
b) A cock is offered by the Dokpwégâ.	
PLATE 49.	384-385
The societies to which the children of the dead belong come to sing songs in honor of the deceased several months after death (Whydah).	
PLATE 50.	384-385
a) A country village.	
b) The village well.	

NOTE ON PHONETICS

The system of rendering the phonetic values of Fɔ used in this work is, with a few modifications, that suggested in the revised edition of the Memorandum "Practical Orthography of African Languages" issued by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, and in that of the American Anthropological Association, "Phonetic Transcription of Indian Languages." It is as follows:

Consonants: *b*, *ch* (as in English "church"), *d*, *ḍ* (cerebral *d*, capitalized D), *dj* (as English *j* in "judge"), *f*, *g*, *gb*, *gbw*, *h*, *x* (as *ch* in Scottish "loch"), *ɣ* (as *g* in colloquial German "lage"), *k*, *kp*, *kpɔ*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *ɲ* (as *ng* in English "sing"), *ny*, *p*, *r*, *s*, *sh* (as in English "shut"), *t*, *v*, *w*, *y*, *z* (as in English "zebra").

Vowels (the so-called 'Italian' values are indicated unless otherwise stated): *a*, *α* (as English *a* in "hat"), *e* (as English *e* in "met"), *ε*, *ē* (as French *é* in "été"), *ι* (as English *i* in "hit"), *ï*, *o* (as English *au* in "author"), *o*, *ō* (as French "eau"), *u*.

Nasalisation of vowels: *α̃*, *ᾱ*, *ε̃*, *ε̄*, *ι̃*, *ῑ*, *õ*, *ō*, *ũ*.

Diphthongs: *α̃i*, *aũ*, *eĩ*, *oĩ*, *ɔ̃i*.

Nasalisation of Diphtongs: *α̃ĩ*, *aũ̃*, *eĩ̃*, *oĩ̃*, *ɔ̃̃ĩ̃*.

Long (doubled) vowels: *α̃̃*, *ε̃̃*, etc.

Tone: high, *á*; middle, *a*; low, *à*.

high to low, *á*; high to middle, *á*; middle to high, *á*; middle to low, *à*; low to middle, *à*; low to high, *ǎ*.

Part I

INTRODUCTORY

Chapter I

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR SETTING

1

Although at the end of the 18th century, the observation is made in the preface to Dalzel's History of the Dahomean kingdom that "from Whydah beach to Abomey . . . is perhaps the most beaten track, by Europeans, of any in Africa," Dahomey has nevertheless long stood in the minds of Europeans as one of the most exotic and least known portions of the "dark continent." Fantastic tales of its wealth, of the extravagance of its kings, of its battalions of women soldiers—"Amazons," as they are termed—of the cruelty of the human sacrifices which marked its religious rites dot the literature, and have persisted in the face of the relatively numerous first-hand accounts of life in the kingdom and its capital.¹ It cannot be said, however, that the published exaggerations concerning Dahomean life have gone unchallenged. In 1864, Sir Richard Burton was impelled to protest against such statements as appeared in *The Saturday Review*,² which "gravely informs its readers that 'The King of Dahome has lately been indulging in a sacrifice of 2000 human beings, simply in deference to a national prejudice (!) and to keep up the good customs of the country' (!!)." Ten years later Skertchly, whose detention by King Glele left him with none too friendly a regard for the Dahomeans and their ways, wrote that "Their name . . . as a nation is perhaps the best known of any West African tribe, and the most exaggerated accounts have been published concerning them. For example, in a recent periodical it was stated in good faith that the king of Dahomey had just invented a new court costume composed of the 'labels off medicine bottles'. *Ex uno disce omnes!*"⁴ That this false picture should exist for the European public is, however, not entirely without explanation. It was a settled policy of the King of Dahomey to reveal no more of his kingdom to foreigners than was necessary, and once in

¹ A volume entitled "Lobagola" is the most recent fantasy concerning Dahomey.

² July 4, 1863.

³ Burton, p. xiii.

⁴ pp. x-xi.

his capital, the European visitor was virtually, if not actually, a prisoner until he received from the King his "pass" to return to Whydah. Furthermore, the Dahomean state also maintained strict control over the traders who operated on the coast, and consequently though those who wrote of their experiences may have given sober accounts of what they saw and heard, there was sufficient misunderstanding of certain aspects of Dahomean life to foster sensational interpretation. Thus the paradox has arisen of one of the most visited of West African kingdoms bearing a reputation of being one of the least known.

What are the descriptions available for a study of the life of the Dahomean kingdom prior to its conquest by the French in 1892? A brief review of the source material may be made at this point, since these volumes contain important complementary data to the ethnographic descriptions which form the bulk of this work. More specifically, this body of data serves here initially a two-fold purpose. On the one hand it provides information about the Dahomean kingdom that may be placed beside observations of Dahomean culture made in the field at the present time. On the other it furnishes a picture of life under the kings of the Aladaxonu dynasty that may be compared with that given by present-day Dahomeans out of their knowledge of native tradition relating to the earlier days of the kingdom. It must be recognised, moreover, that historical materials of this type hold a value that transcends their more obvious use as control data, since relatively little is known of such matters as the rate of cultural change in primitive civilisations, or the extent to which folkloristic versions of ancient customs are founded on fact. The information in these early volumes has therefore been utilized as fully as possible, and investigation into the literature on Dahomey has been considered an integral portion of this study. As with all cultures, that of Dahomey is the product of its historic past; hence the more this past can be recovered, the greater the insight with which its civilisation today can be studied.

One of the earliest records of what is now Dahomey, written before the Dahomean kings had conquered their way to the coast, is that of William Bosman, a Dutch ship-captain.¹ Bosman, whose work con-

¹ The full titles of these volumes, which will be referred to merely by the author's last name, will be found in the bibliography. Another book, contemporaneous with that of Bosman, which also treats of Whydah, though only in passing, is that of Barbot. Burton, (vol. 1, p. 17) also notes a work by Thomas Phillips, (London, 1693-94), which he describes as "a quaint old log-book," which "supplies a good account of independent Whydah." It has not been possible to obtain a copy of this book, however.

sists of letters sent to his principal in Europe, described life on the West Coast of Africa as he knew it, devoting considerable space to the kingdom and city of Whydah, which was later to become the sea-port of Dahomey. Bosman's account, acknowledged by contemporary writers to be accurate and trustworthy, gives a vivid picture of the late seventeenth century coastal kingdom—an important one for the slave-traders—detailing the prosperity of its well organised and numerous population.¹ By 1724 the Dahomean army had captured the kingdom known in the old works as Ardra, the capital of which was the present town of Allada. An agent of the British trading company operating on the coast, Bullfinch Lambe by name, was stationed at Allada, and was captured by the Dahomeans and taken to Abomey. The first European to visit that city, a letter is on record from Bullfinch Lambe to the governor of the English fort at Whydah asking for aid looking toward his release. Two years after the capture of Ardra (Allada), Captain William Snelgrave arrived at Whydah to find that three weeks before—in February, 1726—the city had been taken by the Dahomeans. Snelgrave, looking for slaves, sailed a short distance down the coast to a seaport named Jacquin which, then flourishing, was later sacrificed to the ambition of Dahomey and exists not at all at the present time. He was summoned by the Dahomean king to proceed under escort to Allada, and he gives the first detailed account of the court ceremonial.

In 1744 the report of William Smith, a surveyor for the Royal African Company, dealing with the peoples of the Guinea coast, which he had visited in 1726, was posthumously published. His account was followed, in 1789, by that of Robert Norris, who visited the court of the King in an endeavor to facilitate slave-trading with him. Between the visits of Smith and Norris, about 1760, a writer named Atkins seems also to have gone to Abomey, but no trace of his report could be found. Archibald Dalzel's "History," the next volume of the series, published in 1793, gives a useful compilation of the works of the earlier writers, and, in fact, reprints the major portion of Norris' book. Dr. John M'Leod published his book in 1820, and this was followed by the books of Captain John Adams and, more importantly, of John Duncan, an ex-soldier, who had earlier been a member of the ill-fated Niger expedition. Duncan's work is notable because of his description of the country north of the city of Abomey.

¹ Foé (pp. 269–270) tells how, in 1670, an ambassador from the King of Ardra was received at the court of King Louis XIV.

The Kong Mountains had long attracted the Europeans who had seen them from the plateau of Abomey, but Duncan was the first to reach them. Forbes' book, in 1851, follows that of Duncan, and in 1861 the first modern French account of Dahomey, written by a M. Wallon, appeared.¹

The next of the series, that of Commodore Wilmot of the British Royal Navy, who, sent on a mission to Dahomey in 1862-63, reported his discoveries to the House of Commons, is more significant for one of its results than for its findings. For, on the basis of this report, it was determined to send another mission to treat with King Glele regarding the suppression of Dahomean slaving, and the leader of this mission was the scholar and explorer, Captain, later Sir Richard, Burton. Burton's book is the most valuable of all the long series of works on Dahomey which preceded his. Possessed of great linguistic ability, and fascinated by Fɔ, the language of Dahomey, he gives the first comprehensible translations of the Dahomean names, and by far the best phonetic transcriptions of his time. He had considerable freedom to observe what was of interest to him, for, like many African potentates, the reigning King was eager to have the facts about his kingdom "put in a book," and Burton made the most of his opportunities. How careful were his analyses of Dahomean custom and belief will be seen from the numerous references to his work in the pages that follow. Eight years later, in 1871, J. A. Skertchly came to the West Coast of Africa to collect entymological specimens. When he arrived at Whydah, he was invited to Abomey for an eight-day visit to instruct the King's troops in the use of a certain new type of gun. The King, however, took a fancy to Skertchly, so that not eight days, but eight months elapsed before he was permitted to descend to the coast. He, too, explored the country to the north of Abomey, and during his stay in the capital, like several earlier writers, he witnessed the annual customs for the royal ancestors. His book is followed, in 1873, by that of La Fitte.

In Skertchly's day, the slave-trade had finally been put down, but the Dahomean policy of territorial expansion by conquest was the cause of conflict with European governments whose traders operated along the West African Coast. By 1890, the situation between the French and the Dahomeans had become tense. On February 24, 1890.

¹ This account, also mentioned by Burton (vol. i, p. 26, note 2) was, like that of Phillips, not to be found. Burton, however, felt that the data given by M. Wallon represented great distortion of fact.

a group of nine Frenchmen were captured and later taken to Abomey. The following year one of these, M. Chaudoin, published an account of his three months' captivity, giving a description of conditions within the kingdom immediately prior to its conquest. In 1890, a description of the Ewe-speaking peoples, by A. B. Ellis, appeared. This work, however, is of little value to one who has access to Burton and Skertchly, on whose accounts it is almost entirely based. In 1895 a volume by Edouard Foá was published, which though purporting to be descriptive of Dahomey, treats almost entirely of the coastal peoples, especially those of Porto Novo whose culture is more Yoruban than Dahomean. Neither of these last two works, therefore, are of more than passing interest for an understanding of Dahomean life. Some years after the French conquest of Dahomey came the most recent addition to this list of sources on Dahomean life, the contribution of Le Herissé, which was published in 1914, after the author had had some years of contact with the Dahomean people as Administrator and Resident in Abomey. Working under great handicaps as representative of a conquering people, he nevertheless gained the confidence of several Dahomeans and his analysis of Dahomean culture constitutes the only systematic treatment to date of any adequateness.

It is characteristic of practically all the earlier writers that they were fully cognizant of the accounts that preceded theirs. From the time of Snelgrave to that of Skertchly, reference to the writings of each author's predecessors is the rule. There is, consequently, a constant checking and re-evaluation of earlier statements, which materially enhances the usefulness of the data contained in these works for modern scientific analysis. The early writers were captains of slaving vessels, travellers, engineers, or official commissioners of European states, and their books are with but few exceptions the day by day record of their experiences and impressions. Except in the volumes of Ellis, Foá, and Le Herissé, there is no attempt to give a systematic description of Dahomean life. All the writers were so impressed by the complexity of the political organisation and the strength of the monarchy that the discussions of the King, his wives, his property, of the ceremonies associated with the royal ancestral cult, of the organisation of the officialdom of the kingdom and of the army occupy the major portion of their works; and relatively little is to be gleaned concerning the daily life of the Dahomeans. Burton and Skertchly, it is true, devoted space to the religious life, as did Le Herissé, who, in addition, studied the social organisation of Dahomey.

But, in the main, the modern ethnologist finds, despite the high calibre of these works, only inferential evidence for the study of what today is of far greater importance than the political administration of a kingdom—the life of the people.

2

The area of the present political division of Dahomey is greater than that of the pre-conquest kingdom. Duncan, during the escapade which took him almost to the river Niger, was never outside the boundaries of the present French colony of Dahomey, yet he was far beyond the region over which the Dahomean King exercised control. The boundaries of the pre-conquest kingdom must therefore not be confused with the limits of the colony of Dahomey as it is now constituted. These boundaries at the present time comprise the regions about Porto Novo and Cotonou which were never under the control of the native kingdom, and, similarly, the eastern and western fringes of the present colony which were also only nominally a part of the Dahomean state. At its height it never attained a more northerly spread than the eighth parallel north of the equator: in the words of Le Herissé:

“En profondeur, il s’étendait sur plus de 200 kilomètres, depuis la mer jusqu’aux Monts des Mahis; en largeur, il ne dépassait pas les deux lignes, presque parallèles, du Koufo à l’ouest et de l’Ouémè à l’est.”¹ Burton has assessed the early estimates of the Dahomean kingdom, and feeling that the extent and population of the kingdom “have been grossly exaggerated,” he takes up the statements of Dr. M’Leod “who never left Whydah,” Commander Forbes, and others who, he says:

“... have assigned... [to Dahomey]... the wide region between the so-called Kong Mountains on the north, and the Bight of Benin on the south, a depth of two hundred miles. The rivers and lagoons of Lagos, others say the Niger, are made the eastern, while the Volta River and the Ashantis become the western frontier. This gives a breadth of one hundred and eighty, making a total area of 36,000 square miles.

“Such boundaries may have been, although I greatly doubt them: now we must reduce Dahome to nearly one-tenth. Her northern frontier, bordering on the Makhis, is a water called Tevi, eighteen hours of hammock, equal to forty miles, from Agbome, giving a maximum direct distance of one hundred miles. On the north-eastward, beyond the tributary Agoni tribes, are the Iketu and other Nagos or Yorubans,

¹ p. 2.

who have been plundered, but never subjected. To the northwestward are the semi-independent races of Aja, of Attakpame, and others. The extreme extent, fifty miles, narrows towards the south, giving the province a pyriform shape. The base between Godome or Jackin, the easternmost settlement, and the frontier between Whydah and the turbulent independent Popos, cannot exceed twenty-five to thirty miles. Assuming, therefore, forty miles as the medium breadth, we obtain a superficies of 4000 square miles. Moreover, as has been shown, this small black Sparta is hedged in by hostile accolents. 'Porto Novo' and Badagry, to the eastward, have fallen into European hands, whilst the Popo republics, on the west, are safe in their marshes. The people of Agwe 'came in' last year, and were received by the King, but they will add an element of weakness."¹

Yet, when we investigate some of the statements, such as that of M'Leod, we find that they were not in as great error as might be expected:

"Dahomy, including the subjugated districts, extends at least a hundred and fifty miles into the interior; its breadth is not well ascertained. The sea-coast is in 6° 12' north latitude, more or less, for no very correct survey of this coast has ever appeared. Abomey, the capital, lies from eighty to ninety miles north, a little westerly of this, in about 3° east longitude.

"It is bounded by the Mahee and Ashantee countries to the northward and westward; by Eyeo, to the northeast; Popoe is on the southwest side; and several inconsiderable states, such as Jacquin and Badagry, intervene between it and the kingdom of Benin, to the south-eastward."²

Duncan is the first to mark the limits of the northern boundary of Dahomey with any definiteness, and notes "Savalou," "Jalakoo," and the country of the Maxi as the outposts of the Dahomean empire in this direction. Respect for the prowess of the King of Dahomey was as prevalent among the powerful peoples of the north as it was nearer the coast, however, and Duncan tells how, when he had an interview with the King of Koma:

"a great many questions were... put to me as to how I happened to come to Abomey, and if I had seen that great warrior, the King of Dahomey."³

Skertchly gives what is perhaps the most specific contemporary version of the area of Dahomey:

"The Kingdom of Dahomey is generally understood to include the country between the River Volta in Long. 0° 56' East, on the West, and Badagary in Long. 2° 53' East, on the East, and to extend northwards to the Kong Mountains, in about 8 deg. North Latitude. It

¹ Vol. ii, pp. 154-155.

² pp. 15-16.

³ Vol. ii, pp. 95-96.

therefore has, according to this estimate, an area of about 15,000 square miles. The actual coast line, however, extends only from Mount Pulloy, a few miles to the west of Whydah, to Godome, about ten miles to the eastward of that port. The boundaries are very vague, and the jurisdiction of the King is but nominal anywhere except in the district immediately surrounding the capital, so that the extent of country over which the King possesses actual authority may be roughly estimated at 4,000 square miles."¹

Within this area, the people represent a unit, both culturally and ethnically. For even though, from the earliest days, reference is made to the various "kingdoms" found in the region, it is well to recognise that Bosman's and Snelgrave's kingdom of Whydah had a coast line of perhaps not more than fifteen miles and an interior depth not exceeding twenty, that the neighboring kingdoms of Jacquin on the east and of Popo on the West were similarly restricted in size, while the oft-mentioned kingdom of Ardra—the present Allada—was not much greater, and consequently one soon learns to qualify the ethnographic importance of these political divisions.²

There can be no question that minor differences exist today, as they did exist, between the cultures of the various peoples who comprised the Dahomean state. There are differences in speech, but these are of a dialectic character; differences in religious belief, but merely in the names of deities or the emphasis placed on a particular deity; and so for all phases of culture. The most significant difference within the kingdom were those to the north, though even here the rule of the Dahomeans never extended into the country of the Mahommedan peoples. The "true" Dahomey, however, was recognized in pre-conquest days, as it is recognised today, as the restricted region immediately about Abomey, with the subsidiary area that centers about Allada. Abomey and its vicinity constituted the center of power. Here the "Amazons" had their headquarters, here artisans and artists lived and worked under the control of their monarch. And as with any capital, Abomey benefited from the large revenues which, as will be seen, accrued so plentifully to the Dahomean throne. In Allada the kings of Dahomey were crowned, and, as is frequently stated in the literature as well as in contemporary native tradition, the ruling dynasty of Dahomey originated there, and took its name, Aladaxonu—"ancient people of Allada"—from that of the city. In

¹ p. 36.

² Foá (pp. 37-38) holds that the Kingdom of Ardra stretched eastward from its capital, Allada, as far as and including the present city of Porto Novo.

Whydah, also, the essentially Dahomean character of the culture is apparent. Despite its long contact with Europeans, it remains impressively Dahomean to this day. As the only port of the kingdom, it was an important and populous center of control, and hence, with Allada, is to be regarded as one of the three principal cities where Dahomean culture may be observed in its purest form.¹

4

Recorded European contact with the Dahomean kingdom began toward the end of the 17th century, and since the publication of Dalzel's History, several writers have supplied lists of the Dahomean kings. The tabulation on page 13 presents those available. That of Norris and Dalzel is first given, then that of Burton and Skertchly, for the latter had obviously derived his catalogue from Burton (who, though he based some of his findings on the "History," also checked with native tradition); finally, those of Foá and Le Herissé, the most recent, are cited.

These catalogues of the Dahomean Kings show a high degree of correspondence. That they do not show a greater one is due to the fact that every Dahomean monarch, as, indeed, every West African individual of any standing, possesses not one, but a large number of names. The "Aho" of Burton, Skertchly, and Foá was in all probability the "Ouégbadja" of Le Herissé, for the word *axo* is a Dahomean term for prince. The Adahoonzou of the oldest list is not unlikely one of that King's "strong" names, for all the dates except those of Foá's list coincide with but one exception, namely, that neither Skertchly nor Burton include Adanzan, who in Le Herissé's account, is said to have usurped his brother's power, and to have reigned from 1797 to 1818. The reason for the omission in Burton's account—which is the reason for its omission in Skertchly's—is explained by Burton in his discussion of Agongolo, the seventh king, where he refers to M'Leod's report as follows:

"Dr. M'Leod's Voyage to Africa so confuses dates and documents between 1803, the year of his visiting Dahome, and 1820, that it is

¹ It was for those reasons that the field-work reported on in this volume was carried on in these three cities, the work being concentrated in Abomey, the center of Dahomean civilisation, with subsidiary investigations at the other two important localities. In these pages, however, the term "Dahomey" is employed in the strict native sense, and refers to the "real Dahomey"—to Abomey and its immediate vicinity—unless specific exception is noted.

impossible to make out from his pages the date of Agongoro's demise. He says, 'an instance of this sort (i.e., setting aside the eldest son and heir) occurred, however, at the demise of the late King, Wheenooheh (Agongoro), when the eldest son's right of primogeniture was disallowed because one of his toes, from some accident, overlapped the other (Commander Forbes calls it a club-foot); and his next brother, the present King, who, with respect to form, is certainly "a marvellous proper man," was elected in his stead.'

"This seems to point to King Gezo, but as I have stated, Dr. M'Leod, though repeatedly alluding to the reigning monarch, never quotes his name. Captain John Adams (Remarks on the Country from Cape Palmas to the River Congo: Whittaker & Co., London, 1823) leaves us in equal ignorance, perhaps for the same reason, viz., that he did not know it himself.

"Gaze, being a man with a peaceful character, and afflicted with gibbosity, yielded his throne to a younger brother, Gezo, who therefore was not, as Commander Forbes stated (Chapter I.), a usurper, and died on July 24, 1861. Another brother, Adanzan, raised, as is customary, a mutiny: he was put down, and still, I believe, survives, a state prisoner."¹

The last sentence gives us the explanation for the hiatus, for if Adanzan was still living in 1863, no Dahomean would dare mention the fact. The traditional account, however, agrees with Le Herissé's version, which, in the above tabulation, has been filled in to account for the time between 1797, which is given as the death of Agongolo by Le Herissé, and 1818, the date of the accession of Gezo. Le Herissé's comments on this may be quoted:

"On verra que Ghèzô n'est pas le successeur d'Agongolo. Il chassa du trône son frère Adanzan, dont les atrocités et les injustices avaient lassé les Dahoméens et dont le nom a été rayé à tout jamais de la dynastie. Il avait eu auparavant à supporter les haines des partisans d'Adanzan; mais il avait résisté à toutes les attaques."²

The Dahomeans at the present time do not hesitate to speak of the cruel Adanzan who, taking the regency during the minority of Gezo, so loved power that there was no extreme to which he would not go to maintain it. All the recent writers who have dealt with the history of the Dahomean succession seem, moreover, to have overlooked a passage in Forbes which, written in 1851, substantiates native tradition concerning the reign of this King. Forbes states that Agongolo:

"was succeeded by his son, Adanzah, whose fate is uncertain;

¹ Vol. ii, pp. 291-293.

² p. 19. The fullest account of Adanzan's usurpation of the throne, and how Gezo gained his rights as King, is contained in Foá, pp. 18-21. Unfortunately, the reliability of this vivid description is not such as to permit it wholly to be trusted.

<i>Norris-Dakel</i>	<i>Burton-Skertchly</i>	<i>Fod⁸</i>	<i>Le Herissé¹⁰</i>
Tacoodonu conquere red Abomey c. 1625	Dako ⁴ 1625-1650	Dako 1625-1640	Dako (c. 1625)
Adahoonzou ¹ c. 1650	Aho 1650-1680	Dan 1640-1655 Aho 1655-1679	Ouègbadja ¹¹ 1650-1680
Weebaigah c. 1680	Akaba 1680-1708	Akaba 1679-1708	Akaba 1680-1708
Guadja Trudo ² 1708-1731	Agaja 1708-1727	Agadja 1708-1729	Agadja 1708-1728
Bossa Abadi 1732-1774	Tegbwesan 1727-1774	Tegbouèssou 1729-1732 Mpèngla 1732-1737 Agonglou 1737-1774	Tègbèson 1728-1775
	Sinnmekpen		
Adahoonzou II 1774-1789	Kpengla ⁵ 1774-1789	Adonozan 1774-1808	Kpèngla 1775-1789
Wheenoohe ³			Agongolo 1789-1797
Sedozaw 1789-	Agongoro ⁶ 1789-1818 ⁷		[Adanzan ¹² 1797-1818]
	Gezo 1818-1858	Guèzou 1808-1858	Ghèzô 1818-1858
	Gelele 1858-	Glélé 1858-1889	Glélé 1858-1889
		Gbédassé 1889-1893 ⁹	Gbèhanziñ 1889-1894
			[Ago-li-agbo 1894-1898] ¹³

¹ It is quite possible that Burton's and Skertchly's failure to obtain the name "Adahoonzou" in their lists of kings is because during the time of Gezo and Glele the very name of this usurper was forbidden to be spoken, and hence other names of this King were employed. — ² Lambe gives his name as Trudo Andati. — ³ This was his "princely" name. — ⁴ Skertchly gives "Daho." — ⁵ Skertchly gives "Mpongula." — ⁶ Skertchly gives "Agongolu." — ⁷ See Burton, vol. ii, pp. 290-291. s p. 11. — ⁸ Fod's comment on this name is as follows: "On a changé ce nom en Bédanzin, Bédassin, Bèhanzin, etc.; il s'appelle aussi Atjere. Tous ces noms de rois ont, à peu de chose près, la même signification. C'est la traduction d'adjectifs tels que le Puissant, le Grand, le Fort, le Courageux, le Fatigué, le Miséricordieux, le Dangereux, etc." — ⁹ The French orthography, as given by Le Herissé, is retained in this column, as in the one preceding. — ¹⁰ Le Herissé, p. 13, reconciles the name "Ouègbadja" with "Aho." — ¹¹ Mentioned by Le Herissé, but not in his list; given, however, in native tradition. — ¹² This King was set up by the French, but is not recognized in native Dahomean tradition, which otherwise coincides with Le Herissé's list.

generally hated, he was, by the will of the people, deposed, and Gezo reigns in his stead."¹

The same writer also gives the details of the deposition of Adanzan:

"On-Sih, king of Jena, died, and the heir-apparent, Dekkon, hated and rejected by the chiefs and people, fled for protection to Abomey. Adonajah, king of Dahomey, received him with regal state, but refused to march an army to assist him. Adonajah's mother was a Jena woman. The chance of so fruitful a slave hunt was too tempting to the Dahoman people: already disgusted with the cruelties of their monarch, they, with one consent, called his next brother, Gezo, to the throne; and Adonajah, seized in his harem, was confined in his palace; where, it is said, he remains to this day, a drunkard and a sensualist, enjoying every luxury money can purchase or war seize; wanting, however, the two great desires of our nature—liberty and power. The new monarch instantly headed an army, and marched on what was expected an easy conquest, attended by Dekkon."²

According to native tradition, Adanzan stopped only at the murder of Gezo, who had been named by his father as heir to the throne.³ In the ritual of the royal ancestral cult, the names of those members of the royal family who were sold into slavery are called and the places to which slaves are supposed to have been sent are named. This latter knowledge, the Dahomeans state, is derived from the experience of the mother of Gezo who with numerous retainers was herself sold into slavery shortly after Adanzan took over power, with the end in view of withholding from Gezo the counsel of those who would most favor his gaining the place destined for him.⁴ The accession of Gezo in 1818, however, is well established, and there are no difficulties after that time. The last king in Le Herissé's list, Ago-li-agbo, is not recognised by the Dahomeans themselves, who say that he was merely a puppet of the European occupation and that the dynasty ceased ruling when Behanzin was conquered in 1892.

4

It is not necessary to do more than sketch here some of the important episodes in the expansion of the kingdom, for the history of

¹ Vol. ii. p. 89.

² Forbes, vol. ii, pp. 24-25.

³ The native traditional account of Adanzan's reign is given in Le Herissé, pp. 311-318. Le Herissé remarks (p. 318, note 1), "Adanzan aurait vécu en prison jusqu'au temps de Glélé." This supports Burton's statement quoted above.

⁴ See M. J. and F. S. Herskovits (II), for the details of the tradition concerning the selling of Gezo's mother.

the growth of Dahomey has been recounted in almost all of the chronicles since the time of Dalzel.¹ The history of the actual founding of the kingdom is not known. The first mention of the Dahomeans is made by Barbot and Bosman, who speak of the power of an unnamed kingdom to the north of Whydah and Ardra (Allada). In the myth which recounts the slow conquest of the plateau of Abomey by the Aladaxónti dynasty, an "historical" explanation of the origin of the name Dahomey is given, and such is the vitality of this tale that there is little difference between Norris' version of 1789, Le Herissé's rendition of 1914, variants published in the interim, and the myth as given in Abomey in 1931.² Norris may be quoted here:

"The Dahomans, but little more than a century ago, were an inconsiderable nation; formidable however to their neighbours, for their valour and military skill: they were then known by the name of Foyes; and the town of Dawhee, which lies between Calmina and Abomey, was the capital of their small territory.

"Early in the last century, Tacoodonou, chief of the Foy nation, basely murdered, in violation of the sacred laws of hospitality, a sovereign prince his neighbour, who made him a friendly visit to honor one of his festivals: he then attacked and took Calmina, the capital of the deceased: strengthened by this acquisition, he ventured to wage war with Da, king of Abomey, whom he besieged in his capital, which he soon reduced; and in consequence of a vow, that he made during the seige, put Da to death, by cutting open his belly; and placed his body under the foundation of a palace that he built in Abomey, as a memorial of his victory; which he called Dahomy, from Da the unfortunate victim and Homy his belly; that is, a house built in Da's belly.

"Tacoodonou after this conquest fixed his residence at Abomey, and assumed the title of King of Dahomy; of which the cruel circumstance just mentioned gives the true etymology; and from thence also the Foyes,³ his subjects, are generally called Dahomans: in the country indeed the old name of Foyes prevails; but to Europeans I believe, they are only known by the name of Dahomans.

"Thus Tacoodonou established the Dahoman empire, which about a century afterwards his illustrious descendant Guadjá Trudo⁴ aggrand-

¹ The best account of the political history of Dahomey is contained in Burton, Appendix IV, vol. ii, pp. 265-302, "Catalog of the Dahoman Kings," where the dates of their various exploits, their "strong" names, and the events of their reigns are to be found in convenient tabular form. The "Histoire du Dahomey Racontée par un Indigène," which comprises the last portion of Le Herissé's volume (Ch. XII, pp. 271-352) is also of first importance, since it contains much of native tradition and presents the Dahomean's point of view toward the growth and decay of the kingdom.

² Cf. among others, Dalzel, pp. 1-2, Burton, vol. i, p. 105, and Le Herissé, p. 288.

³ The present Foy, and the Efons of Burton.

⁴ Agadja.

ized, by subduing various kingdoms and adding Whydah to his dominions, in the year 1727; the conquest of which is particularly related by Snelgrave, Atkins and others."¹

Though history knows little of the early kings, native tradition is greatly concerned with them.² The second King, Hwɛgbadja, is especially important, for not only did his exploits consolidate the conquest of the plateau of Abomey, but to him is assigned also the rôle of Dahomean culture-hero.³ The following short tale records two of his most revered accomplishments:

In Hwɛgbadja's time a chief named Aidopaxe lived in Kana, who before he would allow a body to be buried, demanded a tribute. People could not afford this, and so they would take the bark of the silk-cotton tree, wrap the body of their dead relative in that, and throw it into the bush. When they had done this, the enemies of the man who had died would come at night, cut off the head from the body, and the next morning they would exhibit the skull of their dead enemy under their feet. Now Hwɛgbadja, when he came to Kana, saw that the people wore only loin-cloths, and buried their dead in this manner. He brought a weaver, who taught the people to weave large cloths in which to bury their dead, and other cloths which they might wear. Hwɛgbadja conquered Aidopaxe, and decreed that from that time onwards the dead should be buried in the ground, and the body of the deceased should be wrapped in a funeral cloth. Since that day the body of a dead man has been safe from the vengeance of his enemies, and the Dahomeans have known how to weave cloths.

The conquests of Hwɛgbadja were extended by his son, Akaba, the last King to rule before historic contact with Dahomey was established. Akaba's successor, Agadja, extended the limits of the kingdom to the sea, so that his graphic symbol, as modelled in bas-relief on the walls of the palace at Abomey, is the representation of a European vessel.⁴ Norris summarizes the political and economic exigencies that dictated the expansion of Dahomey southward as follows:

"I knew many of the old Whydasians as well as Dahomans who were present when Trudo attacked that kingdom. They attributed his enterprize solely to the desire of extending his dominions, and of enjoying at the first hand, those commodities which he had been used to purchase of the Whydasians, who were in possession of the coast.

¹ Norris, pp. xiii-xiv.

² Cf. Le Herissé, pp. 279-294.

³ In the version of the tale quoted from Norris which was recorded during the field-work being reported on here, it is Hwɛgbadja who cut open the belly of Dɛ, and thus established Dahomey, not Dako. The same is true of Le Herissé's rendition of this tale.

⁴ Le Herissé, plate 1; Waterlot, plate Vb.

Trudo had solicited permission from the king of Whydah to enjoy a free commercial passage through his country to the sea side, on condition of paying the usual customs upon slaves exported; this was peremptorily refused by the king of Whydah; and in consequence of this refusal, Trudo determined to obtain his purpose by force of arms: he succeeded in the attempt, and exterminated a great part of the inhabitants. His conquest of the adjoining kingdom of Ardra facilitated the acquisition of the other."¹

Bullfinche Lambe's letter from Abomey provides an excellent account of the surprise attack by means of which the Dahomeans, under Agadja, achieved their conquest over Allada, a conquest which, as Norris remarks, placed them in direct contact with the kingdom of Whydah, soon to be overcome.² After subduing the maritime country of Jacquin, Agadja returned to Abomey, remaining there until 1727. Early in that year he captured Savi, the capital of the kingdom of Whydah, later taking the city of Whydah itself. It is not necessary to recount here how the dissolute King of Whydah, relying on the power of his snake deity rather than on the force of arms, made it possible for a small detachment of Dahomean soldiers to effect the capture of his city, for this is detailed in all of the earlier works on Dahomey.³ What is important is the fact that this opened the way to the sea and to unrestrained trading contacts with Europeans, and gained for Agadja the right to sell his slaves directly to the captains of the slave vessels who called at the port, and from them to get, without paying the duties imposed by an intervening power, the European goods he valued so highly.

About three weeks after the capture of Whydah, Captain Snelgrave in the Catherine Galley came to that port.⁴ Since trading had become unsettled because of military operations, he proceeded to Jacquin, and while there received an invitation to go to Allada to see the King. In his book he tells of his reception, narrating details of the court ceremonial that are to be seen at the present time in the courts of the chiefs who, to the best of their power, retain the traditions of the ancient kingdom.

"Next morning, at nine a Clock, an Officer came from the King to acquaint us, we should have an Audience forthwith. Accordingly we

¹ p. x. See also Snelgrave, pp. 5-6.

² This letter from Bullfinche Lambe, dated at Abomey, November 27, 1724, is reprinted in Smith, "New Voyage to Guinea"; and also in Forbes, "Dahomey and the Dahomans." The account of the taking of Allada in the Smith volume is on pages 185-189.

³ Especially Snelgrave, pp. 9-18.

⁴ Snelgrave, pp. 19-22.

prepared our selves; and then going to the King's Gate, were soon after introduced into his Presence. His Majesty was in a large Court palisadoed round, sitting (contrary to the Custom of the Country) on a fine gilt Chair, which he had taken from the King of *Whidaw*. There were held over his Head, by Women, three large Umbrellas, to shade him from the Sun: and four other Women stood beside the Chair of State, with Fusils on their Shoulders. I observed, the Women were finely dressed from the middle downward, (the Custom of the country being not to cover the Body upward, of either Sex); moreover they had on their Arms, many large Manelloes, or Rings of Gold of great Value, and round their Necks, and in their Hair, abundance of their Country Jewels, which are a sort of Beads of divers Colours, brought from a far inland Country, where they are dug out of the Earth, and in the same Esteem with the *Negroes*, as Diamonds amongst the *Europeans*.

"The King had a Gown on, flowered with Gold, which reached as low as his Ancles; an *European* embroidered Hat on his Head; with Sandals on his Feet. We being brought within ten yards of the Chair of State, were desired to stand still."¹

His account of the appearance of a Dahomean king, the first on record, is worthy of quotation:

"As we were almost five hours so near the King, I had a good opportunity of taking an exact View of him. He was middle-sized, and full bodied; and, as near as I could judge, about forty-five years old: His Face was pitted with Small Pox; nevertheless, there was something in his Countenance very taking, and withal majestic. Upon the whole, I found him the most extraordinary Man of his Colour, that I had ever conversed with, having seen nothing in him that appeared barbarous, except the sacrificing of his Enemies; which the *Portuguese* Gentleman told me, he believed was done out of Policy; neither did he eat human Flesh himself."²

The conquest of Whydah, however, was far from achieved by the initial victory, for the inhabitants who had fled to the islands of the lagoon near Little Popo intrigued with the Europeans to regain their hegemony. It is again unnecessary to detail the operations which ensued, nor need the occasions when the Europeans, aiding one side or the other, helped to decide the issue, be discussed here. Agadja continued his military operations, defeating the "Toffoe" people and also conquering the Maxi. During his reign he was constantly harrassed by the threat of the Oyo people—a people who have given the chroniclers much difficulty, but who may be safely identified as the present-day northern Yoruban peoples of western Nigeria.

¹ p. 34.

² p. 75.

Tegbesu, who succeeded Agadja, was similarly troubled by the Oyo, and in 1738 Abomey itself was captured by them.¹ From that day until the time of Gezo, they exacted an annual tribute of the Dahomeans which according to native tradition not only took the form of goods and money, but of a stipulated number of young men and women who were sent to the King of Oyo as slaves.² In 1772 Tegbesu was visited by Norris. The words of Norris, an eyewitness, describe the ceremonial surrounding his reception by Tegbesu as well as the person of the King himself.

"I was received at the door by Mayhou³; on each side of it was a human head, recently cut off, lying on a flat stone, with the face down, and the bloody end of the neck towards the entrance. In the guard house were about forty women, armed with a musket and cutlass each; and twenty eunuchs, with bright iron rods in their hands; one of whom slipped away, to announce my arrival; and Mayhou, walking cautiously forward, conducted me through the first court to a door, near which were two more heads; where, he prostrated himself, and kissed the ground; on which it was opened by a female, and we entered a second court, two sides of which were formed by long shady piazzas: in this we were met by Tamegah⁴ and Eubigah,⁵ who, with Mayhou, frequently knelt down, and kissed the ground, pronouncing aloud some of the king's titles, as we walked across this court, in which were ranged six human heads. From this we passed through a third door into the court, where the king was seated, on a handsome chair of crimson velvet, ornamented with gold fringe, placed on a carpet, in a spacious cook piazza, which occupied one side of the court. He was smoking tobacco, and had on a gold laced hat, with a plume of ostrich feathers; he wore a rich crimson damask robe, wrapped loosely round him; yellow slippers, and no stockings: several women were employed fanning him, and others with whisks, to chase away the flies: one woman, on her knees before him, held a gold cup, for him to spit in.

"When the door, which led into this court was opened, Temegah and his two companions immediately fell down, rubbed their foreheads in the dust, kissed the ground repeatedly, and approached the king crawling on their hands and knees, prostrating themselves frequently,

¹ Norris, pp. 11-16 (Dalzel, pp. 71-75), gives an account of these operations and later developments resulting from them.

² One Dahomean tale was collected which tells how a prince, included among those sent as tribute to Oyo (forty-one men and forty-one women is the traditional number) returns to Abomey, instructs his father how to poison the river from which the Oyo obtain their water, and thus makes possible a victory over them. See Burton, vol. i, p. 130, for comments on who the Oyo people were, and vol. ii, p. 273, for a statement that the annual tribute was begun in 1747.

³ The Meu was second of the King's officials, being ranked only by the Mgã.

⁴ This official is probably the Temegã.

⁵ The Yovogã, or "White Man's Chief," represented the King at Whydah and ruled over the European factors who had trading stations there.

and throwing the dust plentifully with both hands upon their heads; had it been mud from preceding rain, the same ceremony would have been performed."¹

Another short note describing Tɛgbesɛ is also given by Dalzel who says,

"In 1766, when I was at the court of Ahadee, he appeared to me to be about seventy. His person was rather tall, he was graceful in his manners, and very polite to strangers, though the dread and terror of his own subjects."²

Kpɛngla, the next King, continued the policy of expansion, but in spite of extensive manoeuvring was unable to throw off the yoke of the Oyo. There are several non-political incidents told of him which show how closely he held his people to his desires. In 1779, feeling that the roadway from Whydah to Abomey was not adequate to permit easy transit for slaves to the coast and goods into the interior, he gave each of his chiefs a string measuring some thirty feet, with instructions to so widen the road in the district under his control.³ This was achieved even though it involved putting the road through the great swamps which lie between Allada and Abomey, and in 1863 Burton found remains of this work of 1780.⁴ During this same reign a severe earthquake occurred in Abomey and Kana.⁵ The death of Kpɛngla, caused by small-pox, is of significance because of the implications such a death holds in the religious ideology of the Dahomeans.⁶ It will be remembered that in his description of Agadja, Snelgrave mentions the fact that this king's face was pitted by small-pox, and it will be seen that Kpɛngla was not the last King to die of the disease. Small wonder, then, that the small-pox cult was not cordially regarded by the Dahomean monarchs; that the cult houses were compelled to be established outside the city walls on the ground that "two kings cannot rule in one city"—for small-pox in its association with the earth deities, is conceived as the scourge of the "King of the earth."⁷

¹ Norris, pp. 94,–95. (This is also given in Dalzel, pp. 126–127.)

² p. 149. Norris, pp. 127–128, and Dalzel, pp. 148–149, give an account of the last days of Tɛgbesɛ.

³ Dalzel, pp. 170–171, gives the details of this undertaking.

⁴ Cf. Burton, vol. i, p. 115. The present motor road from Allada to Abomey follows the route laid down by this King.

⁵ Dalzel, p. 206, notes this earthquake.

⁶ See Dalzel, p. 203, for an account of Kpɛngla's death.

⁷ Burton, vol. i, p. 157, note 1, discusses the toll which small-pox took of the Dahomean kings.

The events of Agongolo's reign have been summarized by Burton, who remarks that Agongolo "is known to history as one of the most unfortunate of Dahomean monarchs."¹ No first-hand report of the actual appearance of this King is available, nor can any be had of that of his illegal successor, Adanzan, since no European visitor who has recorded his impressions visited Abomey during the reign of the latter ruler. The only comment on him to be found in the literature is the quotation already given from Forbes. With the accession of Gezo, however, the fortunes of the Aladaxonu dynasty rose. In 1827, seven years after the beginning of his reign, he freed Dahomey from the onerous tribute to the Oyo, and he was in direct contact with the great Ashanti kingdom, with whom he maintained diplomatic relations.² Gezo considerably extended the empire to the west, for in 1840 his army reached Atakpame, a city almost one hundred and thirty kilometers northwest of Abomey, at present in the heart of the French mandate of Togoland. He also pushed his conquests north and east, extending his kingdom further into the territory of the Maxi, and ravaging the country of the Nago (Yoruba) people to the east. In 1851, Gezo experienced his first serious defeat. He attacked the Egba stronghold of Abeokuta on March 3, with an army estimated by Burton to have numbered between ten and sixteen thousand. The Egba commander-in-chief out-maneuvered him, however, and he was forced to retire, losing "by a moderate computation, 1,200 of his best fighters."³ Gezo's death, like that of Kpengla, was caused by the dreaded disease small-pox.

There are several first-hand accounts of this monarch written by visitors to his court, for during his reign the European powers sought to prevail upon Dahomey—one of the few slaving territories remaining on the West Coast—to give up the slave-trade. Though he refused to do this, Gezo is represented as a man of humanitarian principles, and all accounts agree that he did his utmost—which in the nature of the case could not have been much—to reduce the number of human sacrifices during the rites for the royal ancestors. Forbes, who visited him in 1849, thus describes Gezo and his entourage on an occasion of state:

"His Dahoman Majesty, King Gezo, is about forty-eight years of age, good-looking, with nothing of the negro feature, his complexion

¹ Vol. ii, p. 290.

² Duncan gives a vivid account of the diplomatic manoeuvrings of an Ashanti envoy at Gezo's court; vol. i, pp. 236-238, 243-245.

³ Burton, vol. ii, p. 298.

wanting several shades of being black; his appearance commanding, and his countenance intellectual, though stern in the extreme. That he is proud there can be no doubt, for he treads the earth as if it were honoured by its burden. Were it not for a slight cast in his eye, he would be a handsome man. Contrasted with the gaudy attire of his ministers, wives, and caboceers (of every hue, and laden with coral, gold, silver, and brass ornaments), the king was plainly dressed in a loose robe of yellow silk slashed with satin stars and half-moons, Mandingo sandals, and a Spanish hat trimmed with gold lace; the only ornament being a small gold chain of European manufacture."¹

He also gives an account of Gezo in private audience:

"...passing through an inner court, we were ushered into the entree of a small room, ornamented with military arms and accoutrements. On a bed, covered with a very handsome mat, reclined the king. In the room were the female ministers squatted on the ground; while, as we advanced and the king rose, the male ministers—the mayo, camboodee, cacoupeh, and Toonoonoo—prostrated and kissed the dust."²

An earlier view of the person of Gezo is that of Duncan, who had good reason to have a kind regard for this King. Duncan describes him as

"...a tall athletic man, about forty-three years of age, with pleasing expression and good features, but the top of his forehead falling back rather too much to meet the views of a phrenologist. His voice is good and manner graceful. in comparison with the barbarous customs of the country."³

The last great King of Dahomey was Glele. The drive actuating the political manoeuvres of this King came from the desire to avenge his father's defeat at Abeokuta, but this was denied him. In 1861, three years after he attained the succession, he moved to an attack, which a small-pox epidemic compelled him to abandon. He continued to harass the Nago villages, however, and thirteen years after his original attempt he again attacked the city. Burton, in a chapter appended to his journal¹ describes the severe defeat which this expedition suffered. Glele learned his lesson, and never afterwards challenged his enemy of long standing. The description of Glele in 1863, as given by Burton, is as follows:

"The King is a very fine-looking man, upwards of six feet high, broad shouldered, and a pleasant countenance when he likes. His eyes are bloodshot, which may arise from want of rest or other causes. He is a great smoker, but does not indulge much in the bottle. His skin

¹ Vol. i, pp. 76–77.

³ Vol. i, p. 224.

² Vol. i, pp. 82–83.

⁴ Vol. ii, pp. 204–210.

is much lighter than most of his people, resembling the copper colour of the American Indians.

"He is very active, and fond of dancing, and singing, which he practices in public during the customs. He is much addicted to the fair sex, of whom he possesses as many as he likes. He is about forty-three years old."¹

Elsewhere he gives an even more detailed picture of Glele, including a careful description of his raiment:

"Like Gezo, Gezo's son and heir affects a dress simple to excess. His head is often bare: on this occasion he wore a short cylindrical straw cap, with a ribbon-band of purple velvet round the middle. A Bo-fetish against sickness, in the shape of a human incisor, strung below the crown, and a single blue Popo-bead, of little value, was hanging to a thick thread about his neck. Despising the Bonugan-ton, or broad silver armlets of his caboceers, he contented himself with a narrow armillary iron ring, of the kind called 'abagan' and 'alogan', round his right arm. Above and below the elbow of the left he wore five similar bracelets; these ornaments were apparently invented to save the limb when warding off a sabre-cut from the head. The body-cloth was plain fine white stuff, with a narrow edging of watered green silk and as it sat loose around the middle, decorum was consulted by drawers of purple-flowered silk hardly reaching to mid thigh. The sandals, here an emblem of royalty, showed some splendour. They were of Moorish shape, with gold embroidery upon a scarlet ground, two large crosses of yellow metal being especially conspicuous. Altogether, the dress, though simple, was effective. and it admirably set off the manly and stalwart form."²

Skertchly, eight years later, gives another account of his dress and entourage on state occasions:

"His arms were naked, except a few rings, with fetiche bags attached, which he wore above the elbow. He smoked a long silver-mounted pipe, and wore a kind of Scotch bonnet, with the dragon of the Bru Company embroidered on the sides. His feet were protected by sandals richly ornamented with leather, and a couple of silver rings jingled round one of his ankles. He was followed by four of his 'Leopard-wives', or *Kposi*, who kept near his person during the review, while a bevy of attendants took turns in holding a yellow and scarlet parasol over his head. Over this parasol a gaudy tent umbrella was held by a squadron of buxom women, who appeared to pride themselves in the manner in which they twirled and twisted it round, in time to the music which had at last struck up a tune something like 'Ninety-five.' The king was a good head taller than any of the Amazons, and appeared to take a pride in showing off his fine person before us."³

¹ Vol. ii, p. 234.

² Vol. i, pp. 158-159.

³ pp. 165-166.

Behanzin, whose conflict with the Europeans resulted in the downfall of his kingdom, succeeded to the throne when he was in early middle age. No European visitor except Chaudoin has left us a picture of him during the period of his reign,¹ but it is plain that his court displayed symptoms of degeneration that marked the decline of Dahomean power after the defeat of Gezo before Abeokuta. Like his father, Behanzin was obsessed with the necessity of conquering the great Egba city to the east; unlike Gezo, he permitted himself to be drawn into intrigues against Toffa, the King of Porto Novo and ruling member of the other branch of the Aladaxonu family, which ultimately brought him the enmity of the French, and cost him his throne.² In the accounts given by the old men of the conquest of Dahomey by the French, Behanzin already is a legendary figure. He was a willful youth, it is said, and ignored the wisdom of his father's pithy saying that "he who makes the powder must win the battle." Because of this, which was actually a warning not to fight the Europeans, say the Dahomean story-tellers, Dahomey was "broken" and became a European possession.³ Yet as a King he had command of the magic reserved for kings, and so, the belief holds, when he saw the Dahomean cause lost, he changed into a bird and only when he knew it to be for the good of the Dahomean people did he give himself up to the French. History tells us that he was exiled to Martinique and died there,⁴ but the Dahomeans believe that after he had taken ship he again had recourse to his magic, and lives on as a bird. So strongly was this held that, it is said, it dictated the decision of the French to return the remains of Behanzin for interment in the royal palace, though the belief in the inviolability of Dahomean royalty is such that many Dahomeans can be found today who tell that the bones actually buried were not those of Behanzin. Notwithstanding this, however, two old women crouch beside his tomb, wives who shared with him his days of power and of defeat.

The political history of the Dahomean kingdom can thus be summarized in rapid resumé. It testifies to the stability of the monarchy, if not to the ultimate wisdom of the policies of the kings. Later in this work,

¹ pp. 244f.

² An account of these intrigues and attacks, as seen from the Porto Novo side, is given by Foá, *passim*.

³ The military operations of the French against the Dahomeans from 1888 to 1893 have been analyzed by Aublet and Poirier.

⁴ A photograph of Behanzin with his wives and retainers, taken in Martinique, is to be seen in Ober (facing p. 160). Hazoumé (p. 4, n. 6), states that he died in Algiers, and not in Martinique.

the internal organisation of the kingdom, both as it can be deduced from the accounts of eye-witnesses, and as it can today be reconstructed from the versions given by native informants in Abomey will be detailed. For the ethnologist, however, political phenomena represent only one phase of cultural activity. Life in Dahomey goes on today little different from the way it was lived before contact with Europeans. We may now turn, therefore, to an examination of the economic pursuits of the Dahomeans, of their social organisation and the daily round of their individual lives, to an analysis of their religious beliefs and ritual, and of their art, as well as to a consideration of the internal politics of the kingdom. In doing so we shall attempt to understand the inner life of Dahomey, hidden yet always present, as it existed from the days of the early travellers who from 1700 were in contact with these people.

Part II

ECONOMIC LIFE

Chapter II

PRODUCTION

Dahomean culture is characterized in all its aspects by a rigidity of structure that manifests itself in a consciously close organisation of society. This regimentation of life was in evidence when the first Europeans visited Abomey, and all the early accounts comment upon the techniques of social control that were operative, and the response to discipline which they called forth. Indeed, it is this genius for organisation that may be held in some measure to account for the long reign of the Aladaxonu dynasty, for these monarchs and their counsellors came to know how to shape the institutions of the people so as to create, strengthen and perpetuate a centralized and absolute rule. Such organisations as secret societies, for example, were prohibited during the period of autonomous rule, for it was logically felt that the manipulation of possible avenues for the expression of discontent by those who found a constant discipline uncongenial might serve to undermine the completeness of the control which the monarch exercised.

It is not strange, therefore, that this is reflected in the inner life of the people, where it expresses itself in terms of a ready response to discipline, and above all in the acceptance of the stricture that the path to ultimate satisfactions lies in constant application to the task at hand. For the Dahomean, it must be understood, exhibits a capacity for hard work that is in striking contrast to the stereotype of the tropical Negro.¹ How intense the application which the farmer gives to his fields, what long hours the iron-worker spends at his forge, and how constantly the weaver applies himself to his loom, will become

¹ Bosman, p. 318, states of the Whydah folk that "Whereas the Gold Coast Negroes indulge themselves in Idleness, . . . here, on the contrary, Men as well as Women are so vigorously industrious and laborious, that they never desist till they have finished their Undertakings; and are continually endeavouring after Work, in order to get Money." Burton, whose opinion of the Dahomeans was anything but high, writes (vol. i, p. 119) "The general aspect of the country confirms the general impression that the Dahomans were, for negroes, an industrious race, till demoralized by slave hunts and by long predatory wars."

evident as this discussion develops. Furthermore, this traditional view of hard labor as praiseworthy is held by women as well as men. A woman who sells in the markets often first walks thirty, forty or more kilometers to the centers of wholesale distribution where she buys her wares, and then transports her burden to the market on her head; or, arrived at the market at daybreak, she spends long hours selling her goods; while, the day over, there still remains for many of the sellers the evening meal to be prepared. Boys and girls are encouraged early in life to occupy themselves with the tasks that will be theirs when they are grown, and thus the ideal of hard work is inculcated. This attitude is perhaps best reflected in the saying "Every Dahomean man must know three things well: How to cut a field, how to build a wall, and how to roof a house." It will be seen, when the organisation of the young men is discussed, how no one, and symbolically not even the King himself, might hold himself exempt from the command to participate in the cooperative labor of farming and house-building.

The occupation most widely practised in Dahomey is the cultivation of the soil.¹ The fields are made ready at the end of the dry season, and the amount of labor involved in the task of "cutting the ground" depends on whether the earth had previously been cultivated. But even where the preparation of a field means planting land in use the year before, the work is difficult enough. Baked in the heat of the dry season, the earth becomes hard and parched, and is no simple matter to hoe. If the plot, however, is on land never before under cultivation, the work is far more arduous, for the small bush and timber must be cut down so that the underbrush may dry preparatory to burning over the land before the ground is broken.

Work of this kind is only done by the men, who cut the trees and brush, supervise the burning, and hoe the earth.² The hoe used has a broad blade measuring nine to twelve inches across and about the same in length. The handle, at most no more than three feet long, makes necessary a stooping position while hoeing which, in turn, allows

¹ This is true despite Burton's statement (vol. ii, pp. 165-166) that, "Agriculture is despised because slaves are employed in it."

² Burton, speaking of the practice of clearing the ground by burning, under the date of February 15th, 1864, says (vol. ii, pp. 193-194) "All was sunburnt, and, in many places, black with the fires whose smoke and glare, rolling up from the east and southeast, had not infrequently, during the last fortnight, rendered my observations unreliable." His statement (vol. ii, p. 165) that "the women ridge the ground neatly with their little hoes" is contrary to practice at the present time, if it does not represent a false observation on his part. Cf. Foá, pp. 135ff., for a description of coastal agricultural technique and a list of the crops raised.

the worker to give his strokes greater force and precision. An individual is never seen hoeing alone, the smallest number observed in a field being two; but more generally three or four men work together. More than four constitute a *dókpwe*, a group of men engaged in cooperative labor.¹ The work is done with a rhythmic swing, the soil being broken by the cultivator as he moves backward, step by step in a straight line, forcing the edge of his hoe into the earth and throwing the dirt to one side with a twist of the blade as it comes up. This produces the typical Dahomean field of long straight rows of earth, a foot or more high or, if yams are to be planted, of rows which consist each of a series of small hills.

Before the actual labor of clearing a new field is undertaken, however, other requirements must be met than those having to do merely with the availability of the site selected for cultivation, for the farmer must ascertain what supernatural beings watch over the new land and how to assure the aid of these beings for an abundant crop. He therefore takes a sample of its soil to his diviner, who, as a first formality throws the palm-kernels to consult Fate whether the new ground may be cultivated.² If the answer is favorable, a sacrifice to the Earth is then made, wherein the suppliant, taking earth from the projected field, moulds it into a human head with caury-shells for eyes, and placing this head on the ground offers it palm-oil, the blood of a chicken, and finally maize mixed with flour and water. This ceremony is performed while he is alone in the field, and the figure is left there to disintegrate. With the Earth gods thus initially placated, he returns to the diviner to determine the identity of the guardian spirit of the field. The diviner calls separately on the various gods until one of them is designated by Destiny as the field's tutelary spirit.

It may be assumed that the spirit, in this instance, is *Dambada Hwedo*, a powerful deity of the ancestral cult believed to reside in great trees.³ The man who is to work the field will then name for his diviner the great trees found upon the land, and the diviner proceeds to discover the one sheltering the spirit, which then becomes the shrine of the protecting deity. The owner next pours palm-oil over the trunk as a libation and places an *azag*—a girdle made of palm-fronds—about the tree and thereafter makes an offering of palm-oil at this shrine at the beginning of every native week adding also,

¹ See below.

² The *bokón*, who is the interpreter of Destiny, or Fate, plays an important role in Dahomean life. For the details of the Fate cult, see below, vol. ii, pp. 201–222.

³ See below, pp. 207–208.

a chicken from time to time. Having concluded the initial ceremony, he may begin the preparation, and later, the cultivation of his field, but during this period, and also later when the crops are being harvested he continues his weekly libations of palm-oil,¹ and awaits signs which will indicate whether the spirit of the field is a well-intentioned one. This is manifested in various ways. Thus, if a child falls ill and recovers after a chicken has been sacrificed to the spirit of the field, it is accounted a good omen, but the decisive test is, of course, a large yield. If, however, a succession of harrassing incidents trouble his family, and sacrifices at the tree do not remedy matters, he sees in this a demonstration that the spirit is unfriendly, and, after consultation with his diviner, the field may be abandoned.

When for five or six years a field produces good crops, and the owner prospers, it is his obligation to visit a priest of the cult of the guardian spirit of the field, and from him to ascertain the type of ritual necessary to "establish" this spirit as a beneficent "public" deity. Among other things he must give a ceremonial dance, hiring drums and providing food for all who come. In token of its increased importance, he builds for the spirit a small shelter against the trunk of the tree, and from this time onwards, unless the owner of the field is a priest of this particular spirit, he may himself not sacrifice to it, but must summon a priest of the cult to offer his sacrifices for him. The tree itself becomes communal property, and any one is permitted to worship at the shrine erected at its base—to leave gifts of food, or small pots, or whatever else is acceptable to the god. At the same time, the spirit of the tree, it is believed, will not forsake the one who had first worshipped and "established" it, but will continue to show marked favor toward him and his family.

Once the field has been supernaturally sanctioned and the trees that are not sacred have been cut down, or the brush of the last season has been cut and allowed to dry, if it is an old field; when later the dried brush has been burned and the earth turned with the hoes, the work of sowing the seed is begun. If the field is to bear cassava, a bit of the stalk is inserted into each separate hill. For those crops, such as maize, that require the sowing of grain, the work is easier, and both men and women take part. Proceeding along the rows, the planter, carrying a calabash filled with seeds under one arm, stamps his right heel in the raised soft earth to his right, and stepping back drops three or

¹ That is, he makes his libations every four days, since the Dahomean week is of this duration.



a) Hoeing a field; three representative workers.



b) Detail showing the manner in which the hoe is held and the earth is turned.

Plate 2



Hoeing; the unison with which these men work is to be noted.

four grains into the hole, while with the toes of the same foot, he brushes the earth back over the seeds. He next takes a step with the right foot, and turning to his left, repeats with the left foot the same movements on his left side, thus going down the field until the two rows on either side of him are planted. Other crops are planted along the same rows to take advantage of the spaces not filled by the maize.¹ Thus gourd seeds are planted between the stalks so the vines might run along the ground parallel to the rows; and beans are also planted with maize to allow the shoots to climb the stalks.

A field when carefully worked yields for from fifteen to twenty years. When it becomes exhausted, its owner may either relinquish it entirely or allow it to lie fallow for a period of time, resuming its cultivation when the soil is again fertile. Djídjá, some twenty-two kilometers north of Abomey, for example, is a farming center. The village lies surrounded by large fields, and it has a wholesale market to which sellers of cereals in the retail markets of Abomey and nearby cities come. Much of the land about the village proper was not being cultivated in 1931 because, as explained, this land had been exhausted through too intensive use, and would have to lie fallow. The length of time is not fixed, but there are tests by means of which the cultivator ascertains when cultivation may be resumed. In one instance, a farmer when asked how long a given piece of land would lie fallow bent down, tasted a bit of the soil, and observed that several more years were needed before it could be reclaimed; but farther along the path he repeated the same test, and indicated that it should be ready to bear crops the following year.

One general principle of agriculture is that yams exhaust a field after some three years of planting, another holds that millet must never be planted in the same place in successive years. A few months after yams have been planted, maize is planted about them, the belief being that the roots of the yams nourish the maize, and those of the maize the yams. Yams, requiring fertile soil for successful cultivation, are grown in the great farming areas removed from the cities, for neither the land near cities, nor the plots of ground pressed into cultivation within settled communities possess enough strength to support this crop.

The Dahomean farmer not only practises simultaneous diversification in a given field, but also rotation of crops. Thus, if he plants peanuts in April, he will plant maize in the same field the next season.

¹ Cf. Forbes, vol. i, pp. 30-31.

The theory, like that about the planting of yams and maize together, is an illustration of native reasoning based on observed fact, for the Dahomean has no knowledge of the chemical principles underlying food values in the soil. Tradition, however, dictates that the cultivation of a plant that grows upright should be followed by that of a creeper growing along the ground.¹

The extent to which agriculture is carried on testifies to the basic character of farming as a Dahomean pursuit.² In the city of Abomey, for example, there are few spaces not occupied by houses, roads, or compound clearings where at the beginning of the rainy season people are not at work preparing the ground.³ As the season progresses patches of maize, of millet, of beans and of other crops are everywhere to be observed in the city, and as one travels into the country but little bush is to be found, for cultivation is so intensive that it is not until a distance of thirty-five or forty kilometers is reached that uncultivated stretches are to be seen.⁴ Even the palm-groves are not left idle, for crops are planted between the trees.

There is a well-recognized calendar of agriculture which, following the seasons, is based on the variations in rainfall during the course of the year.⁵ The great rainy season begins in March and ends about July. After a short dry season, the second rains, coming in September, continue for a month or two, and are followed by the great dry season. With the first rains of March, the clearing of the fields is begun. In April maize, beans, peanuts and cassava are planted; during May millet, sorgho and cotton, and in June white beans and peas. Throughout July the growing crops are tended, and maize and yams are harvested,

¹ Duncan gives a further example of this empirical agricultural knowledge of the Dahomeans (vol. ii, p. 249): "They never consider the utility of selecting any particular sort of seed; but after my return to Abomey, the King, who is a great agriculturist, informed me that the latest corn known will, if planted in the proper season, ripen in less than four moons, and also told me that the time of ripening had in many instances been mistaken, from a want of knowledge, and planting the corn too soon before the rainy season."

² Cf. Bosman, pp. 315-316. Forbes, however, reports (p. 30) that the Dahomeans keep but a "tithe of the land in cultivation."

³ So intensive is this cultivation in Abomey, that the space between a road or path and a compound wall, though no wider than a few feet, will be planted.

⁴ In the ceremonies to be described below, there will often be reference to processions going to the "forest." These "forests," which every cult-group, every diviner and every sib must possess, are actually mere clumps of trees with undisturbed brush growing about them. No forests, properly speaking, exist anywhere near Abomey.

⁵ Cf. Burton's description of the manner in which he observed agricultural work, particularly at Whydah, (vol. i, pp. 24-25). His dates coincide with those given here. See Duncan, vol. ii, pp. 16-17, for comments on agricultural technique to the north of Abomey.

although the maize to be eaten is gathered much before this, since by July the ears are so matured that the grains are too hard for human consumption, even when boiled.

The last of July and all of August covers the period of the great harvest, when everything except millet, which must grow a month longer, and cotton, is gathered. Cultivation is resumed in September, when all those seeds of April are once more planted for the second annual harvest. These mature in December when everything in the fields, including the cotton, is harvested. January witnesses a total cessation of agricultural work. It is the time for hunting, and not until the end of February when the hunting season is over does the time approach for planting yams. In March, the men turn again to the preparation of the fields.

The crops are tended by the women, who weed the field and watch over the growing plants. Ants are not greatly feared, since a column marches in a narrow straight line across a field, doing small damage; birds are kept away by the children who accompany their mothers to the field. The greatest scourge of the Dahomean farmer are the locusts, which come in great clouds, eating everything green and destroying the prospect of any harvest. When a plague of locusts appeared in the time of the kings, the royal diviners were consulted to advise what sacrifice would cause the gods to divert the swarm. Generally this resulted in driving a person out of the country, as a scapegoat. The one selected was richly dressed and, laden with silver bracelets and fine cloths, was sent away forever beyond the borders of Dahomey. Death was the penalty if he came back, for it was believed that the locusts went with him, and that his return would bring them into the country again.

Not every day of the Dahomean four-day week¹ is devoted to work in the fields, for on Mioxì no farming is done. Violators of this custom incur the wrath of the Thunder gods who kill offenders with lightning. The story is told of a man whose house may still be seen in Abomey who, being ambitious, was cultivating his fields on this day, when a bolt of lightning struck and killed him. Abstaining from work in the fields on Mioxì is held by Dahomean tradition to have originated from the fact that in ancient days a great battle was fought on this day between two groups of Dahomeans. When the two factions became reconciled, they took an oath that neither they nor their descendants would work the fields on the day that witnessed such bloodshed.

¹ See below, pp. 51-53.

Harvesting, as well as the task of caring for the crops, is in the hands of the women. When the harvest is too great for the women of a single family to care for, the head of that family may invite the relatives of his wife or wives to help with the work. This is a festive occasion, for those who have been invited come singing songs, and are given gifts to repay them for their aid. There are no public ceremonies attendant upon planting, only the usual offerings of palm-oil for the guardian spirit of the field, who is asked to see that good crops are again vouchsafed the cultivator. The spirit receives his rewards when this care has been demonstrated by the size of the crop, for to quote one Dahomean, "It is then we return thanks for what the gods have given us; the Dahomean does not give gifts in advance."

The harvest ceremonies vary with the type of crop. Some of the first grains of millet harvested are ground into flour and put in water, and with this the shrines of the ancestors are sprinkled. Fate is consulted at this time to determine whether animals or strong drink should also be offered at the ancestral shrines and, when the sacrifice called for is that of animals, whether these should be wild or domesticated ones, with the choice narrowing until the particular animals desired are named. "The new year has begun," is said when the millet harvest comes, and many marriages occur at this time, because while the millet is growing it is not thought an auspicious time for marrying.

The yam harvest in July is also an occasion for ceremonial observances. There is no special personage who takes a given first yam in a given district. Each utilizes the first yams of the season he has obtained, whether from his own field, or those bought in the market. Then following his status, he performs the yam ceremony. If one is a diviner, the deity Gbádù must first "eat" of the yams before he himself partakes. To feed Gbádù, there must be kola nuts, drinks, kids, pigeons, chickens, *akásà* (dumplings of corn meal), and snails, as well as many new yams. The rite proper begins in the evening, with the diviner alone before his gods. He takes a knife and cuts the first yam, saying, "Thus I kill the yam." Half of it is for Gbádù, half for Fá.¹ At this time he kills all the sacrifices. In the morning, the yam is pounded in a mortar, and made into a dish called *agá*, which is passed around with *akásà* to everyone who knows his Destiny.² About the middle of the morning, after the new yam has been passed

¹ Destiny.

² In the idiom of Dahomey, this would signify "Everyone who has his Fá." See below vol. ii, pp. 218-219, for a discussion of those who would be included in this category.

about, songs are sung to the accompaniment of gongs: "There is no fire in the oven; the oven stays quiet," and "May Gbádù and Fá kill all our enemies." This continues until early afternoon, when the ceremony is ended.

Men who are followers of the gods of the Sky, Earth, and Thunder pantheons, and of the *lokó* tree, but not of the *txxsu*¹ or Aido Hwedo²—that is, the deities who "eat" yams—perform a different ceremony. With the new yams given to such deities, the worshipper must provide two chickens, as well as beans. A yam is cut in seven pieces, three for the deity, three for his followers, and one for the deity who stands before all shrines and all houses, Legba.³ The two chickens are sacrificed to the god, and must not be eaten by the devotee, who without drums or singing alone officiates at this rite.

The third type of ceremony is that performed by the women of each compound in worship of the deities Yalóde and Tókpòdún, when shells, one ram, three white chickens, *akásà* and the new yams are given as offerings. Yalóde is given two hundred and forty-one cauries with a "thunder stone" (a neolithic type of celt), and a stone containing iron ore, and to these are added "things of the gods."⁴ The ram for Yalóde is killed, the tail being cut off and placed on top of the caury shells. One chicken is killed for the Earth deity found in the iron ore, another for the god of Thunder, with whom the "thunder stone" is associated, while the third chicken is killed for Tókpòdún. Many white kolas are thrown, with both meat and shells offered to the gods. One stew is prepared of pounded yams and the flesh of the ram; another of pounded yams and the meat of the chickens, and all the women and their children are summoned to come and eat. The most important dish, that made of ram's meat, is for the children; the women eat the chicken and yams. This festival, continuing for four days, provides pounded yams each morning for the children, and each afternoon for the women. A priestess for Yalóde leads the dances and there is much singing. After the dance the women give the head and tail of the ram to the children, who go dancing through the village with these. Men may and do watch this ceremony, but they do not take part in it.

Some of the first yams are always given to the ancestors, but this is a quiet rite in which only the descendants of a given ancestor participate, and where only a chicken is sacrificed. There is still

¹ The spirits of the abnormally born, who are believed to live in the rivers.

² The rainbow-serpent.

³ See below, vol. ii. pp. 222 ff.

⁴ No specific information as to the nature of these was obtained.

another type of ceremony, performed by those who engage in black magic, but it was not possible to obtain more than the information that such persons also feed their evil spirits the new yams. Every man who has his "full Fâ"—that is, who knows his Destiny—must feed it first when he divides the newly ripened yams, because it is by consulting his Destiny that he learns when to give these yams to his god. A definite order of precedence is observed if a person must perform more than one of these ceremonies. A woman devotee of either one of the Earth or Thunder gods, and also of Yalóde, must give first to the deity, and last to the god of the women.

The palm-tree is today ubiquitous in Dahomey, and furnishes one of the most important crops.¹ Palm-trees are not farmed in the ordinary sense, as they grow without much care. They are planted from sprouts gathered in the bush where the seeds of wild palm-trees have fallen. Once planted, the palm-tree forever remains the property of the one who has planted it, and of his descendants, even though the land on which it grows had been abandoned by himself or his heirs, and is being worked by another. In the main, this would constitute an exceptional case, for when a man has planted palm-trees on his land he is loathe to allow anyone else to occupy it, and sows it with maize or beans or peanuts or some other crop which does not need the rich soil that the yams must have if they are to thrive. Every year the brush about the trunks of these trees must be cleared away before the field in which the trees stand can be burned over, for otherwise the trees would be killed.

An important reason why the palm-tree enjoys this preferred ownership status is that six years must elapse before a tree matures, and during this time a certain amount of care must be given it. Once matured, however, a tree calls for little attention, bearing its kernels twice a year. The larger harvest is during the period between November and March, the smaller one between July and September. The fruit in which the kernels are contained is sold, for the actual pressing of the kernels and manufacture of the oil is a specialised technique, and even an owner of many palm-trees will buy what oil he needs for his personal use. It is not strange, therefore, that this

¹ This was not always the case; indeed, a number of embassies to the King of Dahomey had as their purpose to persuade the monarch to encourage the cultivation of the palm-tree so that the sale of palm-oil might furnish an economic substitute for slaving. It was predicted several times that palm-oil operations would be very successful in Dahomey, a prediction that time has completely vindicated.

valuable source of revenue which requires so little care should hold such a high place in the Dahomean economy.¹

A measure of this regard, however, may well result from the place of the tree in the religious life. For every Dahomean, whatever his social and economic status, owns at least that palm-tree under which his umbilical cord is buried, and though in Dahomey there is not the magic association found elsewhere in Africa between a tree and the person whose umbilicus is buried under it, yet it is not without significance that a palm-tree should be chosen.

Agricultural produce yields the greatest proportion of Dahomean foodstuffs, while the raising of animals to provide meat is only of secondary importance. The major portion of the territory occupied by the kingdom lies south of the open country inhabited by pastoral peoples, for though the northern edge of the coastal forested belt is not far from the city of Abomey, the traditions which give agriculture primary importance stretch on well into the open prairie-like country occupied, since the earliest times of European contact, by the Maxi. Hence only a few of the large domesticated animals are to be seen in Dahomey. Though early travellers occasionally mention seeing horses, these are practically non-existent in the kingdom, and there are no herds of cattle of any size. The few cattle that are to be observed are of the long-horned, humped variety and have usually been driven into the country to be slaughtered, or are the property of chiefs, or are found where European communities offer a market for milk. However, the Dahomeans are and have been quite familiar with cattle through contact with cattle-keeping neighbors to the north, and this is evidenced by the fact that these animals figure in the folklore, as in the explanatory tale which tells why a white bird is always to be seen following a grazing cow.

In the main, it is the smaller domesticated animals that are raised, though their presence is only incidental to the principal occupations of their owners. Chickens are found everywhere, and, less prevalently, ducks and domesticated guinea-hens. Sheep, goats and pigs are all used for food and figure in religious ceremonies of one kind and another or in the sib mythologies, which would seem to indicate that they have a deep-rooted place in Dahomean culture. Thus, rams, sheep and goats are sacrificed for the gods of the Sky and Thunder pantheons, while chickens, which constitute the most common form of sacrifice are given to almost all gods and spirits. Turkeys flourish here as

¹ Skertchly, pp. 33-34, gives a description of the method of making palm-oil.

elsewhere in West Africa, but although they are found in considerable numbers, they are regarded as more or less exotic, and have never been actively taken into the culture. Aside from the chicken, the domesticated animal found most frequently is the pig. Its flesh is considered a delicacy by the Dahomeans. Indicative of its importance in the life of the people is the fact that it is one of the totemic animals "respected" by one and perhaps two Dahomean sibs.

It is probable that the consumption of the meat of wild animals exceeds that of domesticated forms. In consequence, when considering the production of economic goods, hunting is an occupation which may not be neglected. As will be seen when the taxation system of the monarchy is discussed, the hunters constitute a distinct occupational group, which, in the time of Dahomean autonomy, was recognized as such and subjected to taxation by the King. There are two types of hunters, the professional hunters and those for whom hunting is more or less a pursuit to be indulged in during the leisure afforded by the dry season. Each village has its groups of huntsmen and each group of hunters has its chief. A "great hunt" is still held once every year and, in the season of 1931, it was said that several thousand men participated. This hunt is held in the Dagbe forest, east of Abomey, which is a kind of hunting preserve. The men who participate come from all parts of Dahomey; to quote an informant, "They come from as far as Whydah, Cotonou and Save." Current report had it that during this hunt of 1931 several men were so severely wounded that it was necessary to take them to the hospital at Abomey, and it was stated in this connection that these hunts invariably occasion a number of casualties.

It is no simple matter to differentiate the economic aspects of hunting from its complementary character of bringing its participants into close touch with the supernatural beings of the forest, and for a Dahomean to view the hunt merely as an economic matter of killing animals to be sold for food is almost an impossibility. As will be shown, hunters are held most versed in magic, and their adventures in the forest have made them the instrument by means of which human beings have obtained medicine. Regard for supernatural sanctions is marked in all phases of their professional life. While men are on the hunt, their wives may not eat meat and they must not say to anyone, "My husband is away hunting," but simply, "My husband is not at home." If a hunter's wife does eat meat, she will soon after have news of the death of her husband; if she makes the tabooed statement, she places him in danger of attack by wild beasts.

The chief-priest of Adjagbwé, the spirit worshipped by the hunters of Abomey, receives a hind-quarter of every animal killed in the hunt. Since each hunter must come to this priest to obtain or renew his spiritual power before going on the hunt, the count to see that the total number of offerings tallies with the kill is carefully made, for the sale of this meat in the markets yields the principal revenue of the priests of Adjagbwé. Were any attempt made by a hunter to withhold from them their due, and he were discovered, he would face grave spiritual danger when he next went on the hunt.

Hunting is done by special groups of men, each group comprising the hunters of a given village, and each headed by a chief, called *degq* (hunt-chief). The *degq* is chosen anew each year and the choice rests on that hunter, young or old, who has made the most distinguished record in the past year, especially on the great hunt. It must be understood, however, that a distinguished record is not established by the number of animals killed, but by the supernatural experiences a man has had. When the *degq* is to be selected, the hunters of a village gather under a tree sacred to the hunt, known as the *gbetisq*. This may be any kind of tree—silk-cotton, baobab, fig tree, *lokó* or any other. Under it a great earthen vessel is placed containing a mixture of water and millet, and each hunter stands beside it as he recounts his adventures of the hunt. A man who lied would be killed by the god of the hunt either instantly or during the following year. The assembled villagers listen to his story, and as he concludes, the drums sound, while he plunges his hand in the earthen vessel, and, holding in his cupped hand some of the mixture of millet and water, he calls out, "Whosoever is worthy to drink with me, let him come forward." Should another open a recital of his deeds, and these appear altogether unexceptional, the *degq* sends him away in the middle of his tale and calls for others more worthy to compete with the first one. The hunter whose adventures are acclaimed as surpassing all others—his supernatural adventures, it must once more be emphasized—is selected as *degq* for the following year.

Certain animals are held to possess supernatural powers with which the gods have endowed them as rewards for acts worthy of commendation in very ancient times, or because of totemic kinship. Such animals, when killed, must be accorded special recognition. Thus, when a man brings down an antelope, he must tear off a leaf from the nearest tree, and without paying further attention to his kill, must start to find his *degq*. He may neither speak nor eat nor drink water

until he has accomplished his errand, and a feast must be held to honor the spirit of this antelope. How living are the beliefs about the supernatural adventures met with by hunters is indicated by the stories that are current of certain hunters one sees about Abomey. The wife of one old man, regarded as one of the greatest hunters living, herself now an old woman, is pointed out as having been transformed from a snake into a beautiful girl and given him as a wife in gratitude for his help to a python whose mate was being taken by another serpent. When the robber python and the unfaithful python-wife had been killed, the snake for whom this service was performed thus rewarded him with the hand of his daughter. The folklore of hunting is rich in assertions of the magic of animals that hunters meet in the bush.

There are animals a man may kill; there are animals a man may not kill; and there are animals that may be killed only if the hunter gives a sacrifice when one of them has been brought down. One day a hunter killed an animal called *afiakú*; the *afiakú*, when shot, will not fall to the ground unless he is given something. Now this hunter had nothing to give the animal he had killed, but, since it had been mortally wounded, it finally fell, and the hunter began to cut up his kill. As he busied himself with this, the *afiakú* changed into a man, who, picking up two pieces of the meat the hunter had cut, took them to the hunter's wife, telling her that her husband wished her to have this meat cooked for his return. The woman, thinking the messenger to be one of her husband's aides, did as she was bidden. When the hunter came home and ate the meat his wife had cooked, he fell ill. Upon learning how the meat had been brought to his wife, he called the *dega* of the village, to whom he recounted what had happened. The *dega*, however, told him nothing could be done for him, for he should have gone to his diviner to ascertain whether or not the meat of *afiakú* might be eaten. So, on the third day, the hunter died. Thus it is that *afiakú* is not like other animals. If a hunter kills him, a diviner must be called to tell what sacrifice is to be given before the meat can be cut up. More than this, no ordinary hunter may kill *afiakú*. To do so is reserved for the *dega*.

A hunt itself is described in another tale:

When they are ready to go hunting, they take the young hunter to the bush, and say to him, "Have you no mat?" and then they tell him to gather leaves to make a mat. At night they take the *dega*'s gun and clean it. At first cock-crow the young hunter gets up and cooks for the older ones. When all have eaten, each takes his gun and goes hunting.

The *dega*, carrying his gun, leads them. When they reach a place where there are animals, he places each of the hunters in a tree, so that they cannot be seen. He himself climbs the highest tree of all, that is farthest in the bush, and spies out the situation.

If one of the younger hunters kills a large animal, he must go to the *degq* to tell him, and when the *degq* arrives where the body lies, they make sacrifices and place charms, putting powder into the nose and ears of the animal and on its feet, so that the spirit of the animal will not trouble the young hunter.

Then the *degq* begins to cut up the animal, and each takes his portion and leaves. The *degq* follows them, but he carries nothing. When they reach the place in the bush where they are camped, they find wood and build a fire and dry the meat. Two or three pieces are cooked for the *degq*, for he must be the first to eat of such animals; after all have eaten they have a dance called *sogbwé*, and as they dance they sing:

Fíyε chiyε díyε fiyâ (a)gbo chíyε
 Avovú gbwetó xosogbwé
 Gbodo fiyε dokpó agbó chíyε nedodané
 Fíyε nye chiyε díyε.

Let me remain where the buffalo is found,
 The cloth of the hunter who plays the *sogbwé* drum is torn.
 There, where *agbo* dwells in that place so far away,
 Let me remain.

The following day they again go to hunt. Once more each takes his place. Let us suppose a buffalo passes. Now there was a new hunter who had never shot an animal, and he began to shoot. Those who were in the trees climbed down and ran to where he was, and, when the *degq* arrived, the young hunter showed him the place he was when he shot at the buffalo. Now the *degq* has a charm to find animals who escape when the hunters shoot at them. So he put the cord of this charm around his neck and made himself invisible, that he might follow the tracks of the animal. *Agbo* was in hiding, ready to attack the hunter who would come at him. When the *degq* approached, the animal was about to throw himself at him to kill him, but the *degq* called to him, "Remain there." *Agbo* remained in his place, unable to move because of the power in the charm. The *degq* then took up his gun and shot at *agbo*. *Agbo* fell, and shut his eyes. He fell, rose, fell, rose, and fell again for the third time. The *degq* now had no time to re-load his gun, so he took his knife and approached the animal to try to kill him with the knife. As the animal saw him come he tried to throw himself against the *degq*, and at this, the *degq* dropped his gun and ran away. He called another hunter who was as brave as he, and this hunter took his gun and shot at the animal and killed him. Then they sang:

Agbo nyε gbwetó gbodji gbé səsotq yigbé
 Gbó dā dekpłó gbwe wudé
 Xəsótq hú éđō uγaxwáná
 Mi tádo layonu gbo mi ichina vō dogbwe dē.

Agbo will catch the hunter who throws down his gun.
A child who wishes to learn how to hunt,
When he buys a gun, should first kill a wild pigeon
(before he goes on a hunt).
If I do not return (from the hunt), my life will be ended.

After this they began to hunt again. One of the hunters saw a monkey and shot at it. He thought the monkey was dead, but this was not so, for the animal had hidden behind a tree. This hunter did not call the *dega*. He approached the monkey to dispatch it with his knife. The monkey broke his arm and threw him to the ground and strangled him. After the hunt, when the hunters gathered, they found this one was missing. Now after a hunt if someone does not come, they shoot in the air, so that the one who is missing may hear and know where to come. They shouted and hallooed, but the absent hunter did not come. They began to search for him in the bush. Now, after he killed the boy, the monkey went a short distance and he, too, died. At last they found the dead monkey and the boy. Then the *dega* called all the hunters together. The *dega* said to them, "Before you shoot at an animal, you must know the animal you are trying to kill. Whether it is a monkey or a dove or an antelope or a panther, you must know how to kill it, or you will die."

In addition to farmers and hunters, numerous crafts exist in Dahomey, the craftsmen constituting important groups of producers in the economic system. One of the outstanding crafts is that of the iron-workers. Iron-workers are organized into "forges," each group operating in a separate quarter of the city, or in a separate village, where their houses are found near the long, low, rectangular, open-sided shelters where the forges are erected. The iron-workers do no smelting. They know traditionally how iron is made, but say they no longer use the technique of their ancestors. Smelting, they state, "has not been done for a *thousand* years, ever since the White man came to Africa." As far as could be observed, scrap-iron is used almost entirely, and they do not disdain any piece of old metal that may come to hand. One man was seen cutting a rust-covered bar of iron with a cold-chisel preparatory to heating it in the forge; there were some old automobile parts lying about, and the wheel of what looked like a sewing machine. Discarded rails are much in demand. This scrap, heated and hammered out again, is for the most part made into hoes and bush knives, though in one quarter of Abomey gongs and belled knives for ceremonial purposes are manufactured by a special "forge." The bellows are not of the double pump-type found, for

example, in Nigeria,¹ but are the simple European type to which is attached a chain manipulated either by the iron-worker himself, or by a small boy who, as a member of the family, will become a member of the guild when he is grown. The air is forced through a chamber of clay at the base of the fire, and in this way the requisite temperature is obtained. Charcoal is employed in making the fire, the coals being heaped up just at the place where heat is required by the use of a small metal shovel with a wooden handle. New pieces of charcoal are taken out of a calabash where they are kept, and are individually put on the fire by hand. The bellows, which are made of leather, are taken home to guard against their being stolen at night or on the days sacred to Gũ, the god of iron, when no work is done in the forges. A stone is used for an anvil, but before it can be put to such use it must be consecrated, after which it will serve for many years, being set deeply into the ground. When a new anvil is put into place, it is an occasion both for religious ceremonial and general jollification among the ironworkers.² Repair jobs involving the use of iron are apparently not disdained. In one of the forges visited in Abomey a worker was making a part for a trap brought to him for repair. At the next forge an old man was heating and bending some small pin-like objects, with which he rejoined the parts of a cracked calabash. Next to him was a man making hoes; another was making an implement resembling a pitch-fork.

Weaving is another important Dahomean industry.³ Indeed, the weavers, with the iron-workers, are held as the most honored of Dahomean craftsmen. Weaving is done on the narrow loom usual to West Africa, although in Dahomey the strips are not as narrow as, for example, in Nigeria or on the Gold Coast, but are often as much as fifteen inches in width. Cloth is made, in the main, from thread of native manufacture, for spinning is a widespread industry, followed by old people of both sexes. The weavers, like the iron-workers, have separate shelters for their looms near the compounds where they live, and as with most craft-guilds, the trade is followed by members of given families. Weaving is done in raffia as well as cotton, so that three general types of cloth are produced; cotton cloth, raffia cloth,

¹ The iron-workers, as seen at the present time, fit almost entirely the description given by Dalzel (Introduction, p. xxv). The only difference to be noted is that in his time the Dahomean iron-worker employed the double pump-type bellows. Cf. also the descriptions given by Skertchly, pp. 316, 386-388, and by Foá, pp. 126-128.

² Cf. Burton, vol. i, p. 98, note 1.

³ Cf. Dalzel, Introduction, pp. xxiv-xxv.

and cloths woven of both cotton and raffia. The last named type constitutes the finest Dahomean weaving, both from the point of view of technical excellence and of design, and it is so regarded by the Dahomeans themselves. European contact has greatly lessened the demand for native weaving, for the cloths worn by the Dahomean today are usually European cotton prints made in imitation of Javanese batik designs. However, marriage cloths, and most particularly certain of the cloths offered at funerals may not be of European manufacture, so that in the making of these the cloth-weaver maintains his supremacy.

Men carry on iron-working and weaving, but the women control pottery-making, the third of the principal crafts.¹ Pottery manufacture was witnessed at the village of Umbégame, some ten kilometers from Abomey, one of the three principal centers of pottery-making, each of which is situated where the best clay is found. In this village, the potters specialize in large storage pots, about three feet in height and of a diameter of two feet at their widest point. The young girls bring calabash trays of freshly dug clay on their heads from the clay-pits. This clay, after being kneaded with tempering material, is taken as required by the principal potter and her assistant. For large pots the rim is first made. The mass of clay on the ground is gradually worked up and thinned until the upper five or six inches of the pot are finished. No turning device is employed, the potter walking about the pot as she shapes it, using no guide to determine the accuracy of the circle which is to form the mouth of the pot. When the rim has assumed recognisable shape, the lip is formed; this is done by wetting the clay and then taking a folded wet cloth and fashioning the edge of the rim with it by pressing with thumb and forefinger on the outer and inner surfaces of the clay. The finished portion is now left in place on the ground for some days to be dried by the heat of the sun.

When the initial hardening process of this upper portion has been accomplished, the woman is ready to finish her pot. Turning over the sun-baked top so that it rests on the lip, the potter uses a curved bit of iron to scrape off the dirt that clings to the edge which has been on the ground. The potter's assistant brings her a large piece of kneaded clay, which, after working in her hands for a few moments, she adds to the finished top. Walking about the pot, the potter gradually works the clay higher and higher, the wall being thinned and shaped until the pot has been molded and rounded as far toward the bottom

¹ Cf. Burton, vol. ii, pp. 113-114, and Foá, pp. 130-131.

of the pot (now uppermost as she works it) as the amount of clay she has added allows. She next takes out a piece of wood from a water-filled calabash, and smoothes the surface of the finished portion. Another supply of kneaded clay is now ready for her, and this is coiled on to what has just been finished, this time without waiting for the completed section to dry. The amount of clay added at this time is considerably less than before, and the potter is able to work faster as the circumference of the portion she is shaping becomes smaller. One hand is held inside the pot, one outside, and the process is repeated as before. A third time fresh clay is added, and, as she rapidly approaches the bottom of the pot, a fourth, until the opening is no larger than the size of her arm. After the inner surface of the pot has been given a final brushing with the hand, she works with three fingers inside, then two, then one, and finally rounds off the bottom with a bit of clay the size of the tip of her forefinger. The potter now takes a bit of wood three-fourths of an inch in diameter and three inches long into which teeth have been cut, giving it the appearance of a small corn-cob. Rolling this over the pot with the palm of her hand she thus stipples it, to provide a roughened surface that permits the safer handling of these large vessels. The pot is allowed to remain in place until the sun dries and hardens the clay; it is then put into a storeroom until there is an accumulation of sun-baked pots. Other potters have been similarly engaged and when enough pots to warrant a firing are ready, the women of the district gather and the kiln is prepared. The clay is originally gray in color, but comes out of the fire a reddish brown, and is then decorated with black and white circles painted about the mouth.

Aside from large storage jars, numerous other pottery forms are made. There are bowls and small pots for daily use, and, in addition, the ceremonial pottery for the serpent-cult, for the cult of twins, and for the Earth deities. These latter are made by groups of women at localities other than that where observations were made, since in the manufacture of pottery, as in other crafts, specialisation is the rule.

In addition to the workers in these three fields, there are those others who may perhaps be classed as artists rather than craftsmen. These include those who make objects of brass, silver, and gold; those who clothe chiefs and the devotees of the gods and who stitch designs on ritual cloths, state and ceremonial umbrellas, and on cloth hangings; those who carve calabashes, and those who do wood-carving. These groups do not figure greatly in the economic life of Dahomey, though

taken as a whole, the totality of their products assumes a not unimpressive figure. The brass workers, who also work in precious metals, are members of one family group and are affiliated by blood and by a bond of common interest with the iron-workers. The task of this group is to make objects to beautify the dwellings of the members of the upper classes, and their designs were certainly in the days of the monarchy, and to a great extent today, the result of individual inspiration. The cloth-workers—"tailors," as they are termed—are similarly members of a family guild. Like the jewellers, as the workers in precious metals may be regarded, their task was essentially to supply the appliqued umbrellas, caps, hangings, and banners, that were the devices of royalty in the days of the kingdom and are today the appurtenances of the chiefs,¹ and to clothe the members of the religious cults. The calabash carvers are even a more restricted group than the preceding ones, and their output is small. The finely traced designs which they work into the surfaces of calabashes are highly prized by the Dahomeans, and fall naturally into the class of objects which would be termed luxuries, since their product is used to convey messages of young lovers, and to enclose gifts rather than for keeping small objects of everyday use. Such calabashes there are, but these are not ornamented, and are raised in great quantities by the farmers as a secondary crop.² The wood-carvers comprise a final class of producers. These must be divided into two groups, however—the artists who make the statuettes that adorn the temples or are used as magic house-guards, and those who make the stools, mortars and pestles the Dahomean uses in his everyday life. This does not mean that a wood-carver may not belong to both groups, but from the economic point of view the two must be distinguished, for the artistic products are a negligible element in the economic life.³

The rank accorded the various crafts by the Dahomeans may be indicated at this point. The evaluation of an upper-class Dahomean places the weavers in the highest rank of all the crafts, because their labor supplies the shrouds in which the dead are buried. After these come the smiths who make *asê*—"altars" for the ancestors—the hoes used in tilling the ground, and the bush-knives and other weapons employed in fighting. The cloth-sewers are ranked next, for they dress

¹ Cf. Forbes, vol. ii, pp. 34–35, and Burton, vol. i, p. 137, note 1.

² Cf. Foá, p. 131.

³ For a consideration of the purely artistic aspects of the products of these last groups of producers, the section on Art may be consulted.



a) Planting is done by members of the entire family.



b) The heel is employed to make the hole into which seeds of maize are dropped. Note how the ground between palm-trees is utilized.

Plate 4



a) Within the city, spaces between the road and compound walls are cultivated.



b) Maize grows high toward the end of the rainy season.

the gods, and on ceremonial occasions, people as well. After these are the calabash carvers since, as this informant explained it, "they write the letters we send," this reference being to the use of decorated calabashes as acrostic devices in sending love messages.¹ Then come those who prepare palm-oil, for "without oil we cannot have our soup, and the Dahomeans love their soup."

In another category, and ranking all other occupations come the grave-diggers. These men, who are all professionals and whose position is hereditary, were respected even by the King—before whom, however, they were never permitted to appear—since the grave-digger not only digs the grave, but washes the corpse, dresses and buries it. They do no other work, except when the *dokpwégbé* calls them to do their share of the communal labor.² They may not leave the country, nor sleep without a roof over their heads. In still another category come the makers of stools—"for without stools people could not sit down"—and the makers of the figurines for the shrines to the gods, both of these being highly respected.

Among the women the potters were said to hold first rank, as makers of cooking utensils, and of the ceremonial pottery for the cults of the gods. The men who weave baskets were ranked after the potters, but as an afterthought, it was added that, of women's work, the spinning of cotton surpasses in importance that of the potters and is even more important than the work of the grave-diggers, because shrouds are made from the cotton they spin. The jewellers are less valued than the tailors, according to this list, because whereas all people use articles of clothing, not everyone can afford to buy luxuries. Apart from all of these stands the occupation of farming, since, as has been noted, every Dahomean is a farmer and no matter what his occupation, whether craftsman or not, he cultivates a plot of ground.

To be compared with this listing is that given by the son of a petty chief, who, by trade, was an iron-worker. As might be expected, the blacksmiths are here placed highest, the reason given being that if they did not make the necessary tools, the farmer could not cultivate his land, the wood cutters could not cut their wood, the calabash carvers could not carve their calabashes, and so on through the list of other occupations.³ After them are placed the farmers because

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 344ff.

² See below, pp. 65ff.

³ Cf. Burton, p. 98, note 1, "The blacksmith in these lands is not an object of superstition; the highest craftsman is the King's Huntoji or silversmith."

they "feed mankind." Then, when a person possesses tools with which to make the ground yield, he thinks of covering his body, and hence the weavers come next. The other crafts follow these three—but all are important, for the potters furnish utensils and sacred urns, the cloth workers dress statues of the deities and their devotees, as well as people in general, and so on. Grave-diggers, said this man, are a class apart and are not to be considered when the other occupations are under discussion. But this informant was careful to point out that grave-diggers, like all others, are dependent on the iron-worker, for without their hoes they could not make the graves in which they bury the dead!

These ratings of occupational worth are given to illustrate the varying attitudes toward any aspect of culture among individuals living within a given civilisation, and how the focus is most generally on the individual's own group, his own occupation, or his preoccupation. That these attitudes take shape in outward behavior as well, can be seen by observing the members of these guilds among themselves and in their relations with those of their community who follow different occupations.

Chapter III

DISTRIBUTION

The market is the principal medium for the distribution of economic goods, affording a channel through which the products of farmers, artisans and craftsmen flow to the ultimate consumer, and through which compensation is returned to the producers. Yet more than an economic significance attaches to this institution, for the market-place is also a center for social activities and a place where religious rites are held.

To understand the routine of the market, the Dahomean week, with its division into days, must first be analyzed. As has been reported for a neighboring group in West Africa,¹ two systems run concurrently; one is based on a week of seven days with four weeks to the month, the other on a week of four days having seven weeks to the month. The markets are held according to the four-day system,² which is also the one employed in determining days of good and evil omen, and the dates for religious ceremonials, and which, in all probability, represents the indigenous time-divisions of the Dahomeans.³ The four markets, which give their names to the days of the week, are Mioxì, Adókwì, Zōgodú, and Adjàxì.⁴ That market which is held by tradition to have been the first established on the day it is held gives its name to that day, and is regarded as the most important of the markets that occur simultaneously in different parts of Dahomey.

¹ Cf. Spieth, *Ewe*, p. 311.

² Cf. Forbes (vol. i, p. 55), "At Toree, a large fair is held every fourth day, where goods are exchanged, and passed into the interior."

³ There seems to be no good reason for questioning the assumption, usually made in the literature, that the seven-day week was taken over from European, or according to Le Herissé (p. 355), Mohammedan sources. Bosman, though he reported in 1699 that, "The Negroes live in a manner by guess, making no manners of Distinction of Times ..." yet informs us that they "very well know that every three Days there is a great Market-Day" (p. 324).

⁴ Cf. Burton, vol. i, pp. 222-223, note 1. The order of market-days is the same as given here, except that Burton's list begins with Adjàxì, Mioxì coming second. See also Le Herissé, (pp. 354-355), for the time and location of markets. The days of the seven-day week have the following names, beginning with Monday: Ténì, Tatù, Azágà, Lamísì, Ahósúzán, Sibì, Vodú.

The principal Mioxì is held at Kana, a town which since the time of the Aladaxonu dynasty has been one of the most important religious centers of the kingdom. Because of the veneration in which the Kana market is held, and because of its traditional age, Mioxì is regarded as the first day of the week. Thus, though the most important market at Abomey is held on this day, yet it takes its name from the Kana market, to which it is regarded as subsidiary. Other subsidiary Mioxì markets in the region of Abomey are held at Umbégame and Djídjá. The principal Adókwì market is held at Savakò; others are at Idjesi and Ekpotâ. The principal Zōgodú market is held at Bohicon, a town that has grown considerably in importance since the occupation of Dahomey by the French, because it is situated on the main line of the railroad, as Abomey is not. This, in turn, has caused Bohicon to become the Europeanised trading center for the densely populated region which includes the city of Abomey itself. Other Zōgodú markets are held at Tɛndjì, Bolizò, Dàmòshì, Mòchì, and Aodó. The Àdjàxì market takes its name from the fact that the principal market of that day was established in the region west of Abomey known as Adjâ, near the present administrative center of Parahwe. Other markets are held on this day at Kulikàm and Okonṣá.

It has been stated that each day of the four-day week has spiritual association, being good or bad for certain religious or secular activities. Mioxì is not good for agriculture,¹ or for devotions at the shrines of the gods, since it is believed that on Mioxì the deities do their own marketing. For this reason, ceremonials for the gods are not begun on the first day of the native week, because it would be both discourteous and futile to come to their shrines when they are not at home. Though offerings of food are never given to the gods on Mioxì, it is a propitious day for offerings to Destiny, Fá. A child born on Mioxì will have a scabrous head, because of the effect on him of the noise made in the market-place. Adókwì is not held to be favorable for ceremonies for the dead or for funerals; similarly it is considered inauspicious for the beginning of any rites of the ancestral cult. It is, however, good for agriculture and for hunting. Zōgodú is the most favored day, one on which one may begin any venture; and it is held especially propitious for marriages. On it one gives food to the gods, to the ancestors, and to the spirits that actuate one's personal charms, for it is said that on Zōgodú the gods listen to all men. Àdjàxì is also favorable, in the sense that there are no special prohibitions

¹ See above, p. 35.

attached to it, but it is particularly auspicious for sacrifices to the ancestors and gods, though for such a matter as the initiation of a venture, it is less auspicious than Zōgodú.

The most important factor when a new market is to be established is the assurance that the supernatural forces that rule the lives of men will permit it to prosper. *Ax'izq*, or the market *aizq*, is the name given to the spirit which protects the market. The *aizq*, which is found before every compound, at the gates of every city, at the principal cross-roads and entrances to every district in the country, as well as in every market-place, has as its function the protection of all groups of human beings. In outward form it is a mound of earth under which are buried definite objects to insure the specific guardianship that is required. In market-places, this mound is most often beside a sacred tree.¹ Essentially, the market shrine is made in the same way as any other *aizq*, which would indicate that the spirit that rules the market is different only in degree from those others which care for the diverse forms which human groupings may assume. The functions of the market *aizq* are particularized by placing in its mound, beside the ingredients basic to any *aizq*, earth from seven of the great markets,² and a specimen of each commodity to be sold—that is to say, of all produce, food, cloth, metal, animals, and, in the days of slaving, slaves—everything that can possibly be sold in the new market being given as an offering, in accordance with the principle of sympathetic magic. As in all other phases of life, diviners are consulted before a market is established, to disclose whether or not the gods favor the establishment of this new venture. Once established, the *aizq* is treated much as other supernatural powers; thank-offerings are tendered it for good business, while one may even upbraid it if the day's returns have been scanty. A woman coming to sell in the market may say, when passing the *aizq*, "If I sell all my cakes of *akúsá*, I will give you a present," and, if this is achieved, the offering is placed near the mound with an expression of thanks at the close of the day. Otherwise the suppliant either does not trouble to look the way of the *ax'izq*, or makes the blunt observation that since it has not helped with sales, it can expect nothing from the seller.

¹ The making of an *aizq* will be described in detail in connection with the consideration of religious life, on pp. 301–303, vol. ii., below.

² Though seven bits of earth are necessary, the earth may come from any seven important markets.

The market *aizq* figures in many important ceremonies. For example, in the rites performed for cult-initiates when they emerge from their seclusion of many months in the cult-house, the three places to which they are symbolically lead during the ceremony are the mountain, the river, and the market-place. Later, as *agamasi*, a rank intermediate between the novitiates and those who have completed the training for membership in the cult-group, they beg alms and demand gifts from the sellers and buyers in the market-places. As soon as twins are able to walk, it is prescribed that they must be presented to the spirit of the market. When the *lokó* deity "comes to the head" of a person who has gone through the initiatory rites the new follower of the deity is taken, to the accompaniment of the beating of drums, to the *aizq* of the market. When a child is born whom a diviner declares to be the reincarnation of the first human offspring of the supernatural founder of the sib, the *tshwiyó*, the elaborate ceremony which releases the mother from the taboos imposed upon her as "wife of the *tshwiyó*" have largely to do with announcing that fact to the *ax'izq*, and asking it, as one of the most powerful spirits, to notify all the others powers that this woman has earned her release by the performance of the duties laid upon her. The detailed description of this rite¹ shows clearly that not until the principal participant is to be taken to the market-place are the crucial questions that establish her right to release from her taboos asked of her. These rituals indicate to what extent the non-economic aspect of the market bulks large in Dahomean thought, and show its correspondingly important rôle in the daily life of the people. Yet, at the same time, it must be made clear that this association of the market with religious rites goes along with, but in no wise affects its place as affording the primary channel for the distribution of economic goods.

In the main, the flow of products from producer to consumer is a direct one, the trader in many instances being the producer of what he sells. This is true of all craftsmen, for even though the ironworker sells a hoe that has been cooperatively made by all the fellow members of his forge, it still means selling the product of his own hands, since, as will be explained, he gives the major portion of his time to working the iron of the others in return for their labor on his iron when his turn comes to receive this. Occasionally, also, a member of a company of weavers or potters will be entrusted with the sale of cloths or pots produced by all the members of his group. But in such a case the

¹ See below, pp. 234-238.



a) "The greatest scourge the Dahomean farmer fears is that of locusts



b) "The palm-tree is ubiquitous in Dahomey."

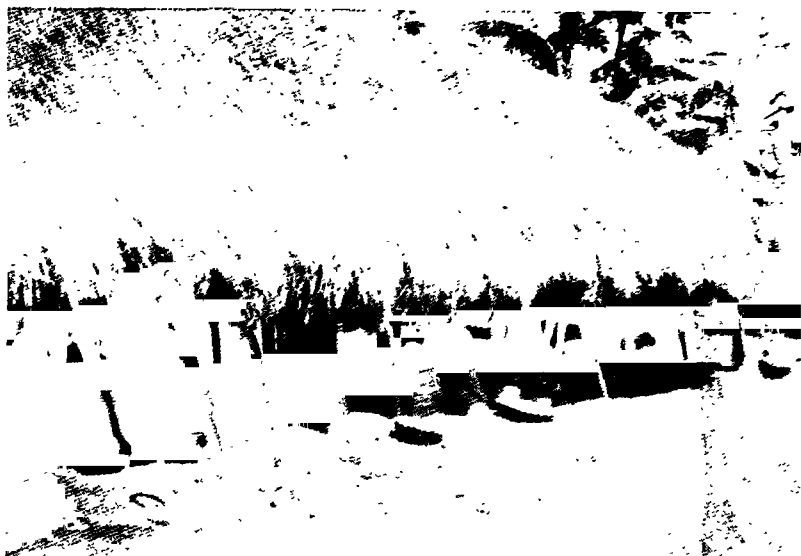


Brass figures representing hunters.



Appliqué cloth having a hunting scene for its motif.

Plate 8



a) An iron-worker's forge.



b) The iron-workers are usually very strong men.

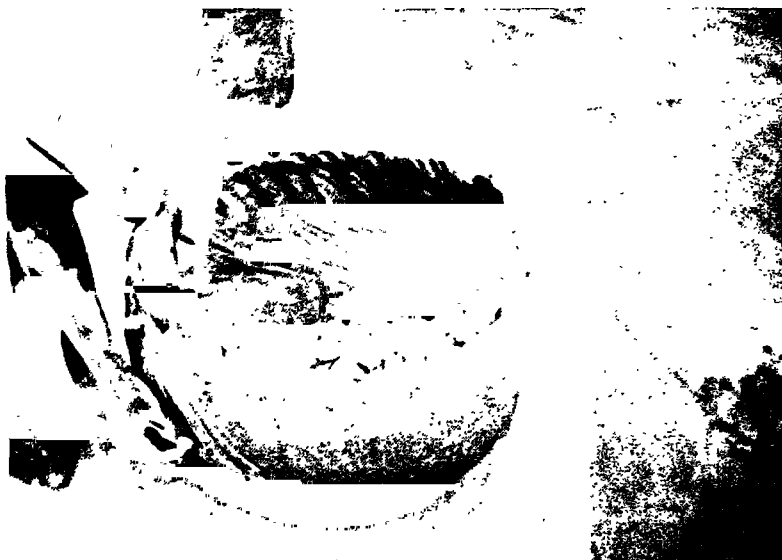


a) The initial step in making a large pot; fashioning the upper portion.



b) Shaping the rim of the pot.

Plate 10



a) No wheel is used to determine the circumference or thickness of a pot.



b) The vessel three-quarters completed.



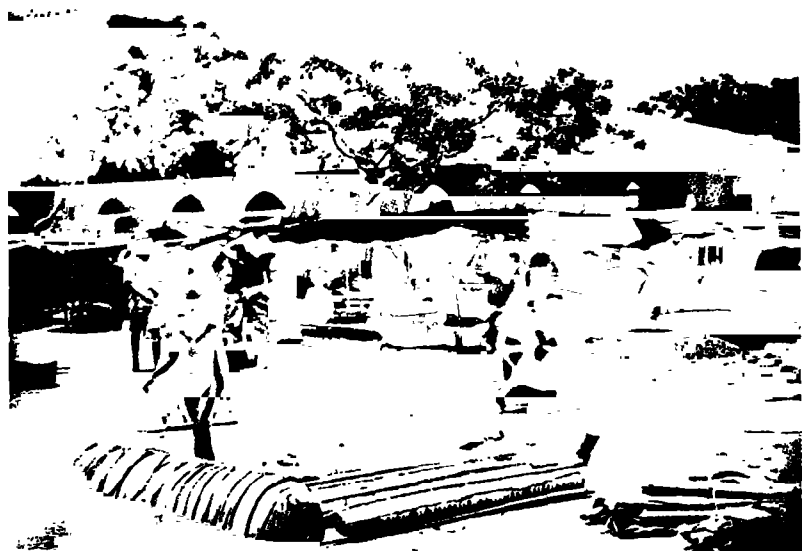
a) "The market is the principal medium for the distribution of goods
The Abomey market on a busy day.



b) The Whydah market in full swing.



a) "There is a constant hubbub of conversation...."



b) "The vendors of a given commodity are grouped together with their wares spread about them...." Calabashes for sale.

seller does not act as middleman, but only as agent, and a strict accounting must be made with the owner of each piece of goods when the market is over and the member of the group returns home.

Perhaps the only type of wholesale market supplying middlemen is the agricultural market. Such a one is to be seen, for example, at Djidjá, northeast of Abomey. This village is the center of an important farming region where the *gletanu*, or great cultivators, have their farms. Some of these farms comprise areas of from fifteen to twenty-five or thirty kilometers in length and several kilometers in breadth. Large farms specialize in the raising of some single food staple. One may produce millet, another maize, and a third yams, although in some exceptional cases, all three crops may be grown by the same planter. Under the old regime, every dignitary had a number of plantations and was therefore one of the *gletanu*. Yet in the main the cultivators of large areas were, and still are, men who live on their farms, tilling them with the aid of their families and, in former times, of their slaves—men who rarely come to the centers where the great markets are held, and all of whose life is given to hard work. These men belong to the great Dahomean middle class, and in the pre-conquest days, if their families were not large they acquired slaves or pawns to help them. The descendants of these slaves today have their own fields, but are still under obligation to work a half of each day for the descendants of the masters.

The isolation in which the *gletanu* live is emphasized by the Dahomeans who described them. It was stated, for example, that many of the large cultivators have never been to Abomey—"I know some who have never seen a bicycle or heard an automobile horn." In speaking of the life of these farmers, the tale was told how one of them, drafted for road work near Abomey, had to be sent home because he could not accommodate himself to the conditions of city life.

This feeling between urban and rural folk is demonstrated by the arrogant manner of the people of Abomey when they visit the villages, while, on the other hand, the villagers show all the typical reactions of European peasants toward city dwellers—they are suspicious, evasive, non-responsive. It seems strange that at the present date there are regions in the coastal belt of West Africa where the sight of a White man is a novelty, but when the White man visits these outlying farming communities he encounters attitudes of curiosity that even the discipline of a village chief, somewhat accustomed to the canons of life in Abomey, cannot quell.

To the wholesale markets where the *gletanu* dispose of their products, therefore, come those who resell at retail. The buyers at these wholesale markets are principally women, for there are few Dahomean men who engage in trade. The produce is piled high, and the women, bringing their containers, buy the provisions they need for the next day's selling. Prices are not fixed by agreement between the *gletanu*, but rather by means of a careful watch kept on the retail market by each man individually. Agents are sent incognito to Abomey to buy grain in the open market, and if, for example, a wholesaler's agent were to buy a measure of meal for one franc, the price to the market-women would be set at eighty centimes. Other circumstances, such as weather conditions and crop prospects, also govern wholesale prices. Thus, when the rains fail to come, the *gletanu* close their granaries, and either refuse to part with what they have on hand in order to preserve their stock of grain for the next planting, or if they sell at all, they do so at high prices. On the other hand, if the rains should come during an incipient drought when prices are high, the cost of produce would fall sharply, and trade would be resumed. As far as could be ascertained combinations of the large cultivators to fix and maintain prices do not exist.

These wholesale markets are relatively quiet affairs, lying remote from the city, for the *gletanu* have no means of transporting their grain over long distances and, therefore, sell their produce in the markets situated close to their farms. The life of the women who sell foodstuffs in the market is consequently very difficult. Rising, as all women do, before dawn, the market-woman places several large calabashes on her head and sets out for the wholesale market, often carrying wares both ways, for she finds it profitable to take articles made in the city to sell in the region where she buys her produce. Thus a woman of Abomey may take pots to the market at Adjâ and there buy maize, returning home with the maize the same night to sell it the next day in the Abomey market. Often women do business in more than one market; an Abomey woman may not only sell in the market of that city, but also in Bohicon. The means of transportation is on foot and when it is considered that Bohicon, the nearest center, is ten kilometers from Abomey, that Djidjâ is more than twenty and Adjâ almost thirty, it can be seen that the time of the women traders is well filled. Those who sell pottery use the three days that intervene between markets to bring their wares to the market-place, and often make the trip between the market towns and the place where they

manufacture their pots several times a day. If a woman has a baby, the infant may be carried on her back. Her stock is always transported on the head and one can see a woman carrying as many as three large calabashes filled with millet or cornmeal or yams, one calabash atop the other.¹

It is said that almost half of all the Dahomean women sell in the markets. When their presence is not required at their business, some of these may tend their fields, but many women prefer not to do agriculture, buying whatever food they require for themselves and their children in the open market, and providing themselves with money by engaging in trade. A large proportion of the women who are not in the markets occupy themselves with preparing commodities that are sold there; thus, the women who make *akàsà* have need of all their time to prepare this food, for which they must first grind the millet-flour before it can be left in water, and made ready to cook. Other women make yam-flour, or they manufacture flour from manioc, or they prepare yams to be fried, while still others make cereal cakes.

A market begins about eight o'clock in the morning. The place where it is held is kept clean on the days when trading is not done there. The wide clearing, free of grass and with but a few trees to afford shade, has only some thatched shelters or, at the present time, two or three substantial iron-roofed pavilions provided by the French government, so that the greater part of the clearing stands exposed to the glare of the sun. By nine o'clock in the morning a fair proportion of the traders have come; by ten the market is in full swing. It has been estimated that as many as ten thousand people pass through the Abomey market-place on some market days.² Those who sell sit on the ground on mats, or on low stools, the vendors of a given commodity grouped together with their wares spread about them. So closely are they grouped, indeed, that the buyer or onlooker must pick his way carefully as he moves about. There is a constant hubbub of conversation, punctuated by laughter or the sound of voices raised in argument over the price of some article. As the day advances and

¹ Forbes, vol. i, pp. 114-115, writes as follows: "This was the market-day at the four-day market at Torree; and all Whydah was on the road, carrying foreign cloths, salt, saltfish, rum, and tobacco, to exchange for corn, palm-oil, peppers, live stock, fruits, vegetables, and country cloth." Tori is about fifteen kilometers from Whydah.

² On one occasion, during the time required to bicycle from Bohicon to Abomey (from about half-past eight to nine o'clock in the morning) two hundred and thirty-eight persons were counted en route to the Bohicon market.

the heat of the sun increases, temporary shelters are erected, short poles being thrust into the ground and mats laid over them.

Towards noon and into early afternoon the crowd becomes more and more dense, so that the market is at its height by two o'clock. After this the crowd begins to thin; people drift toward the side streets leading away from the city, and women who have been so fortunate as to dispose of their produce leave. In the main, though, the streets are filled with buyers carrying their purchases home—a new calabash on the head filled with cloth or holding a new hoe; in one hand two or three chickens, in the other a rope attached to a goat or sheep that has just been bought. By five o'clock the movement is strongly away from the market-place, and, as darkness sets in, quiet settles down over it. Early the next morning eight or ten women are to be seen sweeping away the debris of the preceding day. Each has a palm-leaf broom, and, bent low as she wields it, moves along step by step in time to the strokes. When the women have finished, they leave traceries on the ground of a series of designs made by the regular semi-circular sweep of the broom, while the open space, spotlessly clean once more, is ready for the next market.¹

To detail the wares sold in the market-place would be to catalogue those elements in the material culture of Dahomey that are transportable.² Near the center of the Abomey market, on the south side, the mat-makers are found. These are usually men, and each constructs a little booth of his mats in which he sits as he awaits his customers. There are several kinds of mats to be found here—the finely woven sleeping mats, the mats used in the ceremonies for the deities, the mats that hang in doorways. Nearby are the sellers of native cloth, who have piles of folded material on the ground near them ready to spread out for any interested customer. The greatest activity is to be found on the northern and western fringes of the market-place, where a line of trees gives shade. At the western side of the market, the sellers of live animals take their place, with their chickens, ducks, and guinea-hens, goats, pigs, and sheep. The sellers of foodstuffs are found along the northern border. As has been indicated, both cooked and uncooked foods are available. Of the former, one finds *akásà*, yams—freshly fried for each customer—and in season boiled ears

¹ Duncan, vol. i, p. 120, comments on the cleanliness of the Whydah market.

² Duncan, vol. i, pp. 121–122, gives an unusually complete list of the commodities he found for sale in the Whydah market, while elsewhere (vol. ii, pp. 3–4), he details what was on sale in the village market of Bamen north of Abomey. See also Foá, pp. 143 ff.

of corn. Of the raw foods, corn meal, millet, yams, sweet potatoes, cassava, beans of various sorts, and peppers both fresh and dried are all offered. Here, too, sit the sellers of palm-oil. Little fruit besides oranges, limes, bananas, coconuts, papaya and pineapples are observable, and these not in very large quantities, for the Dahomeans are not a great fruit-eating people.¹ Beverages are also for sale in this part of the market, both those of European origin sold in bottles, usually non-intoxicating, and native palm-wine.

At the eastern end of the market are stationed the tradesmen. Under the roofed shelters are the butcher shops, where the day's kill of pork, veal, mutton and occasionally beef is sold, besides such game as may have been brought by the hunters to the market for sale.² Here also one finds the iron-workers with hoes, axes, machetes and smaller knives on display, as well as the iron standards which are destined for the shrines sacred to the ancestors. Nearby are to be found the unornamented types of calabashes large enough for holding grain, or small enough for drinking cups, or, in the days before the introduction of European chinaware, of a size for eating. These calabashes are brought to market on the heads of the men, and come from the farming districts where they have been harvested, dried, and their inner pulp removed. The bowl-like gourds, cut in half, are put one inside the other until a stack six or eight feet high has been made. Four long, narrow pieces of wood are arranged to form a frame and the rope with which these sticks are attached prevent the calabashes from falling, making it possible for a man to carry a large number of them at once. The men who sell the material needed for charms of all kinds sit not far from the vendors of calabashes. The ingredients for sale, arranged in front of each seller, include the skulls of monkeys, the long bones of various animal forms, bits of the pelt of leopards and other felines, dried herbs, pieces of curiously twisted iron, thongs of different lengths, creepers of special kinds, and such other ingredients as will be detailed when an analysis of the charms which were actually collected is given.

Under the nearby shelters, in addition to the butchers, are the sellers of European cloth, their gaily printed lengths both piled beside them and displayed suspended from wires strung between the posts.

¹ See Burton, vol. ii, pp. 163-164, for the vegetables and fruits he found in the markets.

² Burton, vol. ii, p. 164, lists the wild animals that were available in his time for food, and elsewhere (pp. 162-163) details the kinds of meat that could be purchased.

Here, too, one finds such evidences of European contact as repairers of bicycles, and the tailors who operate European sewing machines and make the trousers and shirts worn by Dahomean men. These latter two groups, however, are always in their places whether there is a market or not, for the shelters they occupy constitute their permanent workshops. Finally, in the north-central portion of the market, on the west side of the permanent shelters, are found those who sell pottery. The various types are segregated, those who sell great storage pots, or small paired pots for twins, or whitened, elaborately decorated pottery for the cult of the founder of the royal sib, or double pots used in the worship of the snake deities, being grouped. Thus one can find in the market everything needed by the native for his everyday life. The only exceptions are those products of European manufacture that are sold in the shops kept by natives, which flank the market-place, though even of these commodities, sugar, salt, kerosene, thread, soap and matches are sold in the market.

In addition to the great markets, there are other means of distribution which, though individually insignificant, probably account for a considerable proportion of the total business transactions. Reference here is to the permanent subsidiary markets, where buying and selling is restricted almost entirely to food staples, cooked foods and other bare necessities of life, such as salt and sugar. Markets of this kind may vary in size from those where two or three women sit under a tree at the juncture of two bush paths, to evening markets, such as that of Abomey, held every day in the great market-places themselves. The small roadside markets operate during the day and sometimes until a short time after darkness has fallen; the evening markets begin shortly after dark, and last until past ten o'clock. None of these are regarded as falling in the same category as the great gatherings to which the word "market" is to be properly applied, but are rather to be thought of as permanent outdoor shops where the Dahomean can be sure of supplementing the staples he has neglected to buy at the four-day market.

The manner in which prices are determined, and the extent to which the price charged for a given commodity is fixed or variable, depends on how the trading in that commodity is carried on. Retail prices in some cases are maintained by trade societies. Though as far as could be determined, these do not exist among the vendors of foodstuffs at Abomey, in the markets of the coastal cities of Whydah and Porto Novo those who sell the same product have definite organisations.

These groupings are called *sodudo* and there is a very real sense of solidarity found among the members. If a member dies, all those who sell her commodity will absent themselves from their trading places for eight days, while the funeral rites are being observed. If a woman is absent from the market, a child will be sent during the afternoon to discover the reason. If she is ill, all the members of her group will come to her home, bringing gifts so that she may not suffer want during the time she cannot work. Prices are set by these societies and each member observes them. Stories are often told of how the members of these groups protect themselves against individuals who come to the market, take goods, and refuse to pay the standard prices, by administering a sound beating to an offender, with all the aroused women of the group participating. An indication of the extent to which solidarity is an actual fact is that when the authorities investigate such beatings, no one can be found who knows anything of the incident!

In the Abomey market, on the other hand, the price of foodstuffs is set by the woman who first arrives at the market, and this price is held to during the entire day by all those who sell the same produce. There is no attempt at undercutting, and the market-woman is indifferent whether a buyer takes what she has to sell or leaves her offering. In this connection an attempt was made to investigate the question of price-cutting, but the only reaction of informants was surprise that anyone should attempt this. It was pointed out that to undersell would not be advantageous beyond the period of one market, since the wholesale prices are stabilized by the farmers, and this would merely mean reduced profits. Moreover, they reasoned, inasmuch as the quantity of foodstuffs any one woman can transport to market is limited, and the demand is also sufficiently known, few of the women who sell staples fail to exhaust their supplies by the time the market is over, and it would prove a foolhardy practice.

In the sale of pottery, there is conscious price-fixing. Pottery is sold not only by the makers, but also by women who buy pots at wholesale, and retail them. When all the pottery of a given type reaches the market-place, the sellers agree on their price for the day, so that there is little haggling over the price of a pot. The price of palm-oil is also fixed. Oil is dispensed in a standard container, which sells for a sum that varies according to the cost of a basket of palm-nuts in the market, so that if such a basket sells for three francs, a woman knows the value of the labor that goes into the making of

the oil and assesses her cost accordingly, while the price, once fixed, is communicated from woman to woman. As indicated, the oil is made by specialists and few natives make their own, but rather buy the finished product. It was asserted that before the conquest, the price of palm-oil was set by the demand for it; at the present time, however, it follows the price set by the world market for palm-kernels.

The price of cloth made by native weavers is also carefully fixed according to the pattern. When a weaver devises a new style of cloth, he sends a sample to all his fellow-craftsmen. He calculates the cost of the cotton, and to this adds fifteen francs if the cloth is for women, and thirty francs if it is a man's cloth. Before the conquest, when European cotton was not available, the cost of preparing the raffia was calculated, but today, when cotton is raised in the colony, the price of native-spun cotton—ten centimes for a carded piece of forty-two lengths—is taken as a basis for calculation. Each pattern has a name, and the names and prices demanded for them in the retail market are well known, and again, there is little haggling in transactions involving them. The blacksmiths, on the other hand, charge no fixed sums for their products. If a man is in need of money, he will sell for less than another who can afford to wait until he gets his price.¹ The same is true of the jewellers—the brass and silver workers—and of those who do appliqué work in cloth. The wood-carvers, tradition has it, fix their prices in a different way. For it is said that the price paid a wood-carver for the first piece bought from him is the price he will expect for every object of the same relative size, as long as the purchaser continues to have any dealings with the carver!

¹ Skertchly, p. 387, tells how prices for iron objects were individually determined in his day.

Chapter IV

THE COOPERATIVE ELEMENT IN DAHOMEAN LIFE

The Dahomean love of organisation is perhaps best exemplified in the numerous associations for mutual self-help which characterize all phases of life. These include such diverse types of societies as those for cooperative farming, for the production of tools and weapons, and for subsidizing the cost of funerals, marriages, and other ceremonies which exact large expenditures from the individual. The basic, and most widely-spread of these cooperative groups is known as the *dókpwè*. On cursory examination, this institution might be thought an organisation of young men, as, indeed, is indicated by the answer that most Dahomeans give when casual queries regarding the nature of the *dókpwè* are asked. To a certain extent this is true, for as far as active membership in these societies is concerned, the young men undoubtedly predominate, since the work they perform is of a kind which elderly men are not capable of doing.¹ When one sees a *dókpwè* at work, however, it soon becomes evident that it includes more than just the young men, for the elderly members of a village can usually be found helping the younger robust fellows by doing such tasks as their strength permits.

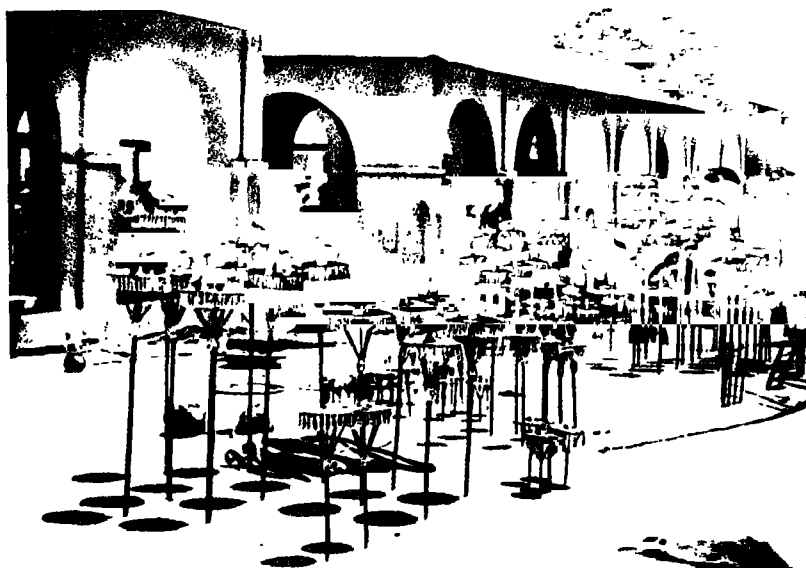
¹ No mention of the *dókpwè* occurs in the literature before the time of Burton, who, however, quite misunderstood the nature of the institution. He speaks of "youths calling themselves 'Donpwe'" who participated in one of the royal ceremonies (vol. i, p. 240), defining the term as follows (vol. i, p. 58, note 1): "Don (young) and pwe (small or young, as in Pwevi). These are a troop of *petits jeunes hommes*, who must do something to distinguish themselves, organised by the King for his especial service, and to counteract the lazy and crafty veterans. These *moutards* are under a head-man, and each great Caboceer has at least one Don-pwe." Elsewhere he mentions the *dókpwè* as comprising those "to whom . . . all the caboceers are committed for punishment," describing one occasion when, after a rebuke has been administered to several officials by the King "the 'Don-pwe' struck up a loud uproarious song, ending in a laughing chorus, to deride the . . . men" (vol. ii, pp. 73-74). Skertchly, in his only mention of the *dókpwè* (on p. 48), speaks of "a corps of soldiers, called the Don-pwe—a sort of state spies . . ." while Le Herissé takes no notice at all of the institution. Burton's definition of the term is probably the result of misinformation, for no Dahomean could be found who ascribed to the *dókpwè* functions other than those recorded in this work.

One of the most striking aspects of this cooperative organisation is the attitude of the Dahomean toward it. It makes little difference whether one speaks of the *dókpwè* to chief or commoner, the immediate response is characteristically one of pleasure. For one thing, to be a member of a *dókpwè* means that a man is a full-fledged Dahomean, and his expression of pride in his membership is an expression of pride in being a Dahomean. Again, the work of the *dókpwè* is regarded not as arduous labor but rather as recreation, and discussions of the *dókpwè* by natives are always interwoven with accounts of the singing, the feasting and the competition, that make the work to be done so pleasurable. The reaction of the Dahomean to the *dókpwè* was phrased as follows by a chief, when he discussed the institution: "It is for everyone; whether you are a chief or a common man, the *dókpwè* will help you. If you need a house, it will build one for you; if you have a field to cultivate, it will break your ground. When you are sick, it helps you; when you die, it buries you. Every man must show respect for the head of the *dókpwè*; when he comes here, I take off my chief's cap to him." Its universal appeal was further explained, when at the same time it was stated that should a chief and a poor man both need the help of the *dókpwè*, it would be given only in the order of asking, so that had the poor man asked first for it, the chief, coming later, would have to wait his turn.¹

The *dókpwè* aids in the three principal tasks a man must assume—the three, as has been observed, every man must master—making a farm, roofing a house, and building a wall.² These all are of a type that may best be performed by group labor, and the relative ease with which they are done cannot but impress an observer who sees a *dókpwè* at work. To witness the speed with which forty of fifty men break the ground for a field, each man hoeing his own row, the hoes striking the ground in unison, the strokes timed by the rhythm of the song of those who, for the moment, have been relieved from work, makes the efficiency of this group attack at once apparent. To see

¹ This latter statement, while given by several persons of various ranks, is so at variance with the pattern of Dahomean behavior as observed that its ethnographic value is to be regarded primarily as an example of the degree to which a living institution can be idealized in the face of actual practice.

² M. Bernard Maupoil maintains that the *dókpwè* is not a cooperative organisation of this kind, stating that though he attempted to find such formally constituted work-groups, he was able only to discover the *dókpwè* as holding a funerary function. Corroborative accounts of similar organisations elsewhere among other West African tribes and New World Negro groups aside, it would seem that the Dahomean appliqué cloth figured in Plate 14 serves as a significant objective check.



a) Iron standards, destined for the shrines sacred to the ancestors.



b) "The men who sell the materials needed for charms of all kinds sit not far from the vendors of calabashes."

Plate 14



a) Digging out earth preparatory to making a wall.



b) Any work done by the Dókpwè is always accompanied by songs.

between seventy-five and one hundred men thatching a roof, some sitting in the shade preparing the thatch, some stripping the poles, some erecting a frame for the thatch on the walls, all to the accompaniment of genial chatter, gives an immediate sense of the feeling of enjoyment which the men get from this cooperative toil. The building of a wall offers another demonstration of this attitude, particularly when the most difficult work, that of digging up the earth out of which the wall is to be made, is witnessed. Here the hoes come into play in the deep pit from which the clay is taken, where there is room for only a few men to work at one time. The other members of the *dókpwè* stand on the edge of the embankment, and to the accompaniment of gongs and rattles, aid their comrades working in the pit below by singing their *dókpwè* songs, which comprise the most rhythmic, the most melodious and the most stirring of all types of Dahomean music.

Each *dókpwè* is headed by its chief, the *dokpwégq*, whose office is hereditary. The *dokpwégq* is a person of considerable importance, not only because he is the head of the men of his village, commanding their unquestioning obedience in all non-political phases of life, but because the *dokpwégq* also has charge of the burial ceremonies for every member of his village. Whether this would indicate that the office had its origin in early times, and was retained by the Aladaxonu kings because of the presence in Dahomey of the widespread African belief that an invading people must placate the spirits of the indigenous inhabitants of the soil they have conquered, is a question that cannot be answered, for if this belief is held, no explicit expression of it could be obtained. In discussing the origin of the *dókpwè* itself, the following typical tale is recounted:

The *dókpwè* is an ancient institution. It existed before there were kings. In the olden times there were no chiefs and the *dokpwégq* was in command of the village. The male members of the village formed the *dókpwè* as today, and the cultivation of the ground was done communally. Later, with the coming of chiefs and kings, disputes arose as to their respective authority. . .¹

Once Hwəgbadja was king, he was no longer able to occupy himself with such matters as seeing that men and women obtained proper burial, so he put these matters in the hands of his prime minister, the Mɛngə. Again there was trouble, however, for the Mɛngə was not above being bribed and, in addition, used his power to humiliate his own

¹ At this point the tale goes on to recount how one Aidopaxe did not permit burials in the earth, and how Hwəgbadja, in subduing him, not only allowed the people to bury their dead, but taught them how to weave. This portion of the story has been given above, p. 16.

enemies. One day Hwɛgbadja saw a column of traveller-ants enter an ant-hill, and then come out with the dead bodies of their victims which they brought before a large ant, one of their officers. As he watched them, the thought came to him that the *dokpwégɔ̀* was the man to whom the work of burying the dead should be entrusted. This happened on the thirteenth day,¹ and that is one reason why the thirteenth is a good day.

As can be seen from this tale, the functions of the *dokpwégɔ̀* as a representative of the spirits of the indigenous conquered inhabitants do not figure in the accounts of the origin of his position. This must not be regarded as of too great significance, however, since the organisation of the Dahomean monarchy was such that it overshadowed all other institutions, influencing and molding them to a degree that would necessarily be reflected in any tales which concerned the traditional history of the early kings. It is not unlikely that a tale which indicated how the *dokpwégɔ̀* controls the earth was paraphrased to exalt the good deeds of an early King, Hwɛgbadja. Certainly, in the mind of the Dahomean at the present time, there is no association of the office of *dokpwégɔ̀* with the ownership of the land, for as will be seen, it is the King in whom the title to land is vested. There is also no association of the *dokpwégɔ̀* with the control of the ancestors, for the ancestors are deified and their worship is directed by the priests of the ancestral cult. Finally, no control over the Earth spirits is manifest in the function of the *dokpwégɔ̀*, for this control is held by those who minister to the gods of the Sagbata or Earth pantheon. At the same time, when it is remembered that no clod of earth can be disturbed without the authorisation of the *dokpwégɔ̀*, whether the purpose is to make a field, to dig a grave, to excavate for a wall or to build a military road, it is not removed from the realm of possibility that what exists is an adaptation of a pre-Aladaxonu belief in the relationship between the office of *dokpwégɔ̀* and the powers of the earth.

The ceremonial of installation of a *dokpwégɔ̀* is carried out today, as in former days, at the palace of the kings in the presence of the head of the royal family. Each *dokpwégɔ̀* names the son who is to be his successor before the head of the royal family or before a chief who is a prince. When he dies, and the time arrives for his son to assume office, the candidate sends the stool on which his father had sat to the royal palace at Abomey, following it himself two days later. It may be assumed that the name of the candidate is Hwɛgbɛ, and that the ceremony is being carried out during the period of Dahomean

¹ The thirteenth day of what, was not indicated.

independence. On the appointed day the King gives the M̄nga, his prime minister, a large cloth and orders him to call Hwɛgbɛ by name. The M̄nga, opening out the cloth, cries out the name, and all the people who have gathered to witness the ceremony take up the cry and shout it in repetition. Usage decrees that it is lacking in dignity for the one thus summoned to be too near at hand, so that after some lapse of time, during which this public calling of his name continues, he is finally located some distance away. Arrived before the M̄nga, the cloth is thrown over his back and he is given a necklace of red beads, his father's stool, and his father's wand of office.

The M̄nga, as the representative of the King, now gives him a handful of sand, and asks for his name.

"My name is Hwɛgbɛ."

"From this day, you will no longer be called Hwɛgbɛ, you will be called Dokpwégbɛ, and you will command all the young men of your village. But before allowing you to take your departure, let me call to your mind the ancient prescriptions of the King:

"The King has said that in Dahomey a chief must see to it that everyone holds firmly where his hand rests. He has said that Dahomey is Aido Hwedo, and the chief is the iron-worker.¹ If you go home and fall asleep, and Dɔ has cut and eaten the bar of iron which is in your custody and given to your care, you will become a lizard with a black tail.² But if you care for the iron, you will be a red-tailed lizard.

"Dahomey is great, and must come before all else. It is because of this that the King has said, 'A chief must not do as the tailor who breaks his needle and tries to sew his cloth with his finger alone, for this is stupid.'

"The King has said that Dahomey is a vast land, and that everyone must confine his work to the place where he lives. That is why it is forbidden to any of the young men who cultivate the earth to stop work in the fields while the grass remains uncut.

"The King has said that a country must be loved by its *tóménú*,³ and that is why he has forbidden his people to migrate from one part of the country to another, since a wanderer can never have a deep love for his land.

¹ Aido Hwedo (also referred to here as Dɔ) is the snake deity who, coiled underneath the earth, is envisaged as supporting it. It is believed that the red monkeys forge bars of iron which this serpent eats and that when the iron fails the serpent will begin to eat his tail and the earth will fall into the sea. See below, vol. ii, pp. 248-249.

² The reference to the lizard with the black tail (*adokpostwɛ*) is a euphemistic way of telling the candidate that he will be put to death if he neglects his duties, just as the following allusion to a lizard with a red tail (*adokpostv*) symbolises life for the chief.

³ People of that country.

"The King has said that Dahomey is an enemy of all the world, and that his chiefs must use as much force in killing an ant as they would to kill an elephant, for the small things bring on the large ones.

"The King has said that Dahomeans are a warrior people, and that, in consequence, it must never come to pass that a true Dahomean admit before an enemy that he is vanquished.

"The King has said that the chiefs represent his authority in Dahomey, and therefore he commands you never to denounce a Dahomean before an enemy who provokes your country, because he does not wish another dog to bark louder than his own.

"The King has said that in the region of Dahomey which you will command, there are men who are refractory, who, though they are rivers, have the will to imitate the ocean. Such small holes must be stopped up, and you must see to it that at Abomey alone the sun may shine.

"The King has said that those in positions like yours, who represent his authority, often do evil things. He forbids the strong to take the possessions of the weak, for this is the way of the hawk who snatches away chicks without asking permission of the owner of the chicken yard.

"The King has said that the chiefs are like the bellows that help the iron-workers make the fire ever redder, so that if any of you keeps for himself the air that is necessary for the fire of Dahomey, he will be used as coal to make the iron hot.

"In closing, the King orders you to allow even the poorest man to come to him, and the strangers who have no protectors in the capital, so that he may help them. And here is the rule of Dahomey: put dust on your head and rise to vow to the King your devotion, and give us your surname."

The new *dokpwégâ*, throwing over his head the sand that has been given him, rises, and in an oration assures the King how faithfully he will do his bidding. He calls on the royal totem, on the spirits of the ancient kings, on the spirits of the royal *txxsu*,¹ and on the King himself, saying as he finishes, "With the help of Agasú."

All cry out, "He will aid you."

"With the help of the ancient kings."

"They will aid you."

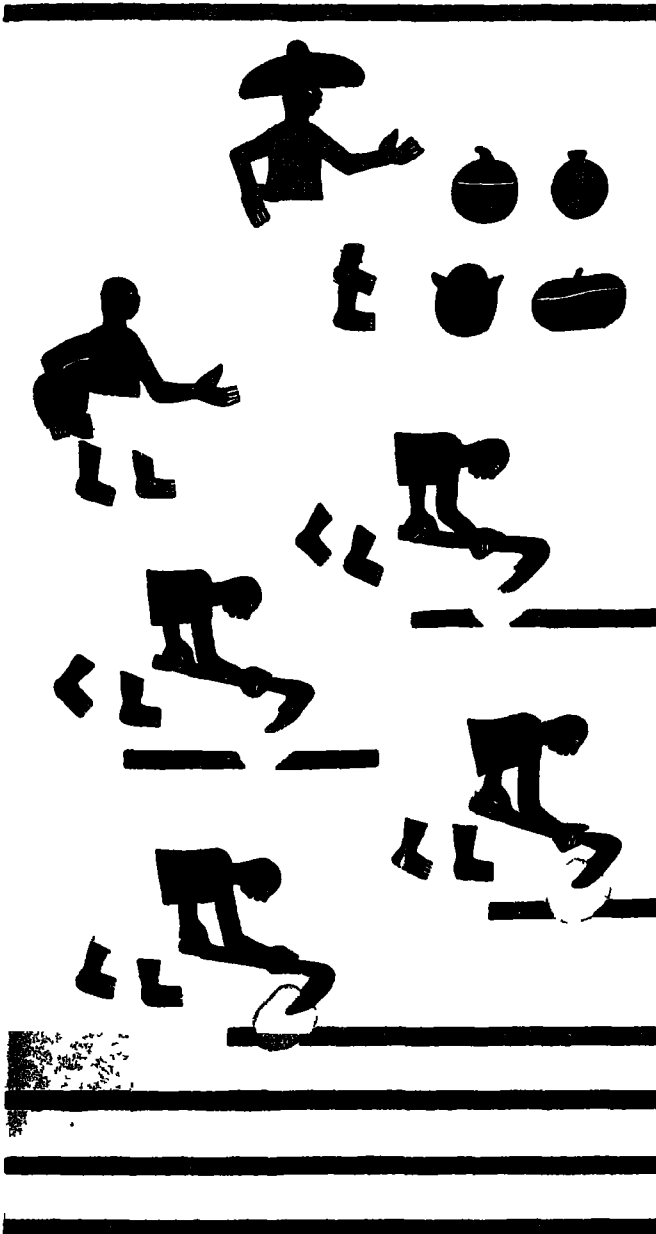
"With the help of Zumadunu."²

"He will aid you."

"With the help of the King who is present."

¹ The abnormally born, who possess especially strong spirits. See below, p. 229.

² Zumadunu is the leader of the royal *txxsu*, and one of the most powerful spirits worshipped in the royal ancestral cult. See below, pp. 230-233.



Appliqué cloth showing Dókpwè at work; the Dokpwégà and his assistant, and the food for the feast.

At this all the chiefs and people kneel, rub their palms together in a gesture of supplication, and cry out, "*Kuse, kuse, kuse.*"

The King makes no answer, but speaking for him, the *Mingā* replies, "With this magic charm you will never fall, for the King is your living benefactor."

The *dokpwégq* turns to his family, who are standing behind him, and says, "With the aid of my father."

The family reply, "He will aid you."

"With the aid of all the *dokpwégq* who have once lived."

To this the King and all present reply, "They will aid you."

Now the newly created *dokpwégq* returns to his place and says, "Today is my naming day," and all cry out, "Yes, yes."

The *dokpwégq* says, "I shall work! At night I shall not sleep, during the day I shall not rest, because rest is not a thing of the day and sleep not a thing of the night. The commands the *Mingā* has given me I shall not forget, but shall keep them for my pillow. When *Dadā*¹ commands anything from the *Gaó*,² I will see to it that he has all the young men, for when *Dadā* raises only so much as his index finger, there is no man in Dahomey but instantly responds. When he goes hunting, he kills much game; when he makes war, he takes many captives. *Mpàhwè!*—I praise the King!" He pauses for a moment, and then continues, "My friends, from this day forth, I shall call myself *dokpwégq* Kpadunu."

At this the King and all present commence to call out his new name. The new *dokpwégq* with no further word, departs with his family, and marches three times about the palace wall calling, "*Chó-ó-ó! Kóhwè-kóhwè! Chó!*"—this being the cry of thanks to the King by a newly installed officer.

Under each *dokpwégq* are three officials, who assist him in the execution of his duties. The first of these is the *asúfagq*, who acts as a general supervisor and is his principal assistant. Next comes the *légèdè*, an official who observes the course of events in the village, makes arrangements for communal work and funerals, sees that all are present when they have been called, and is the functionary who looks after most matters of detail. The third official, the *agutagq*, functions only at funerals, but there he plays an important rôle, for he is the crier who makes all announcements for the *dokpwégq*. These officials are chosen from the young men of the village by the *dokpwégq*

¹ i. e., the King.

² Commander of the army.

with the advice and consent of the village chief.¹ There is no ceremonial when these minor officials are installed, and they hold their offices for life unless remiss in the performance of their duties.

The *dokpwégǵ* is the chief of the young men of the village; to the Dahomean, however, this means that he commands all the men of his village, since, to quote one informant, "What man will admit he is no longer young?" Indeed, to call a young man *dókpwè* means that he is recognized as an adult, for this term may not be applied to a young man until he is old enough to take his position in the community. The rule of the *dokpwégǵ* over the young men is absolute, obedience to his word being strictly exacted and unquestioningly given. Thus, if a party of more than four are about to undertake a common task, they must obtain permission from the *dokpwégǵ* of their village, for five men constitute a "little *dókpwè*," and such a gathering of any number from five upwards is regarded as falling under the control of the *dokpwégǵ*. No man would without serious cause refuse to obey the call of the *dokpwégǵ*. Should he do so without permission, he would be ostracized by his fellow-villagers, his wives would leave him, and his family, punished because of his offence, would become poor. Neither he nor any of his relatives could obtain burial, and if when forced to see his error he wished to make amends, he would have to humble himself before the *dokpwégǵ* whose word he had ignored, and pay a heavy fine. More than this, every man must come forward and greet any *dokpwégǵ* whom he encounters while this official is in command of a *dókpwè* at work, kneeling before the *dokpwégǵ*, explaining his errand, and asking for permission to continue on his way. This permission is practically always granted, but it need not be. Tradition has it that not even the King himself might flaunt this institution held to be the "power" of Dahomey, the force represented by the combined strength of the men of the kingdom. Thus, it is told how once, during the reign of Glele, this powerful King with his drummers, his hammock bearers, and his numerous suite passed a *dókpwè* at work without pausing to greet the *dokpwégǵ*. At once the *dokpwégǵ*, staff in hand, halted the procession, and demanding of Glele why he had violated the rule of the *dókpwè*, summoned him to work in the field. The story goes that Glele made apologies, explained that he had not noticed the *dókpwè*, and offered as a penance to send fifty slaves to work. The *dokpwégǵ*,

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 3 ff., for the political organisation of the Dahomean village.

however, was not satisfied, and that night assessed Glele a fine of many cases of rum and numerous cloths.

That this tale is not to be regarded as historic fact,¹ in the light of the awe which the King inspired in his subjects and the absolute power he had over them, is undoubtedly true; yet the account is nevertheless significant as indicative of the extent to which, in the minds of the Dahomeans themselves, the *dokpwégq* assumes a position of primary importance. To further illustrate this, the example is given of a King who, wishing the following day to go by a new route to Allada from Abomey, would order the Mɔ̀ngá to prepare this route for him. The Mɔ̀ngá would call the head of all the *dókpwè* whose hereditary name and title is Sunyi, who would in turn summon all the *dokpwégq* and order them to put their men to work on the road so that it might be ready. Now, since all Dahomean men are *dókpwè*, the *dokpwégq* of the district where the royal residence was located would also send his wand of office and call the King to work as a member of his *dókpwè*. Upon receiving the message, the King, it is told, would send food and drink for the men, and order out his army, so that there was sufficient man-power to complete the road.²

The functions of the *dókpwè* during funerals will be considered in the later chapters dealing with death, and only its economic aspects will be treated here. First of all, it may be summoned to render mutual aid to its members. The case of a villager who is ill, or who is too old to do the hard work of preparing his field for planting and has no one to call on to aid him, may be considered. In such an instance the *dókpwè* is assembled by the *dokpwégq* to break the ground for the one who is incapacitated, so that planting may be done and the man will not lack food that year. If the owner of such a field is poor, neither the nominal fee for the *dokpwégq* nor food for the *dókpwè* is exacted. He will, of course, have participated in the work of the *dókpwè* during the earlier years of his life, or, if he happened to be a young man and

¹ Unless it was deliberately staged at the behest of the King, as an object lesson to the young men of the kingdom—a form of strategy for obtaining obedience to tradition which the monarchs did not disdain.

² Road-building no longer remains the work of the *dókpwè*, the labor on the road being done by individuals furnished by the chiefs at the command of the European *commandants* of districts. At the same time, it was said that the men who do this work elect "a temporary *dokpwégq*, and several *asogq*," to direct them, "for so work goes best." Le Herissé, pp. 37–38, states how "Le moindre travail qui exigeait la coopération de plusieurs donnait naissance à un chef et des sous-chefs," and goes on to tell of how, during his term as Resident, some boys who were employed insisted on selecting a leader with whom the authorities might alone deal.

ill, he would expect to continue this cooperation. In this sense, therefore, the *dókpwè* is to be regarded as an organisation which insures to each member the cultivation of his fields, even though he himself may be incapacitated.

A second type of cooperative activity engaged in by the *dókpwè* is exemplified in the case of a man whose fields are too extensive to permit them to be hoed by his own labor and the labor of those whose service he has at his disposal. Such a man may summon the *dókpwè* to help clear his fields, but for him the work is not done altogether free of cost, though the amount the owner of the fields must expend is small in comparison with the labor involved. When such a man wishes to call the *dókpwè*, he goes to the *dokpwégq* with a bottle of spirits, four yards of cloth, and two francs fifty centimes, which is divided between the *dokpwégq* and his sub-chiefs. The *lègèdè* is then instructed to notify the members of the *dókpwè* that at the time agreed upon, they are to gather at the appointed place to do this work. It is incumbent upon the owner of the field, however, to provide a feast, and for this he slaughters a goat or a pig, and provides as rich and varied fare as he can afford. This meal is the only recompense the individual member of the *dókpwè* receives.

A *dókpwè* is also called upon to aid men fulfil the duties they owe the parents of their wives. The system, known as *asitoglè*, renders it mandatory for a son-in-law to perform a major piece of work once every year or two for his father-in-law, and to keep the house of his wife's mother in good repair. To neglect these duties entails a serious breach, and should a son-in-law fail without good cause to discharge these obligations, his tardiness will first be called to his attention by his father-in-law, while if he persists in ignoring these duties over a period of years, his wife will be taken away to the home of her parents and will eventually be divorced from him. It is not usual for such tasks to be neglected, however, and for the man with numerous wives, whose total amount of work owed his various parents-in-law is far beyond the power of any one individual, the institution of the *dókpwè* makes it possible for the *asitoglè* system to exist. When a son-in-law has arranged for a *dókpwè* to do work of this category, he requests of his father-in-law to be allowed to perform some task for him. This request is couched in terms which reflect the code of understatement that the relationship of inferior to superior in Dahomey demands, for he says to the older man, "May I be permitted to do some slight piece of work for you in three or four days?" When the wife's father

asks for details, the reply is, "I have ordered some thirty or forty men to come and work in your fields," or "I have arranged for thirty or forty men to build the wall you have been wanting built," or "I have asked sixty men to come to thatch the roof of your new house." It is evident, therefore, why it is said "A man who has many daughters is a rich man."

Yet the inference must not be drawn that a man does not desire sons as well as daughters, nor that sons do not help increase the patrimony, for a son works for his father until the age of twenty or twenty-five. Before a man establishes his own household, however, he does have his own fields, and this establishes a fourth category where the *dókpwè* functions. A son who has his own fields, but who must still serve his father, will request the *dokpwégq* to summon the *dókpwè* to do his required work for him. If he has sufficient means, he will pay; if not, the villagers will do this work for him under the direction of their chief without any cost to him, except his obligation to do the same for them when he is summoned by the *dokpwégq*. Even when a man has passed the age when he is under the direct control of his father, he does not necessarily put aside these earlier obligations, but as a courtesy to his parent may send a "little *dókpwè*" of perhaps fifteen or twenty men to work his father's fields.¹

Once a date is settled upon with the *dokpwégq*, the members of a *dókpwè* who are to perform a given task assemble at the place named by the *lègèdè*, and set out together for the field where the hoeing is to be done, or for the compound where the wall is to be erected or the house to be thatched. They are led by a flutist whose shrill notes they can easily follow, for the distance is often great and perhaps not known to some of them.² They have drums, gongs, and rattles, and use these to accompany the songs they sing. If the one who has summoned them is a man of large means, they may find upon arriving at their destination that other *dókpwè* are at work. This gives added zest to the occasion, for it allows competition in the work. If a field is to be hoed, each *dókpwè* strives against the others to see which can

¹ This deference to the old, or to those of superior position in the family, is fundamental in Dahomean usage and is reflected in all types of behavior as, for example, where a mature man of position will sit on the floor instead of on a stool when in the presence of his father or of an elder brother who has inherited the headship of his family.

² In the case of one *dókpwè* observed building a compound-wall in Abomey, the men, accompanied by the girls of their village, had come from a distance of forty-five kilometers, where the village in which the son-in-law of the compound head had his residence was located.

first finish its allotted portion. If the task is to thatch a roof, each *dókpwè*, if there are two, takes a side and, in each stage of construction tries to be first to reach the ridge-pole. The reward for those who are quickest is the privilege of singing songs of derision against the opposing *dókpwè* until the laggards have caught up with the winners. This desire for competitive struggle goes so far that if only one *dókpwè* is present, it will be divided, one-half of the members competing against the other half. What is accomplished by a *dókpwè* bulks large, but the labor of any one individual is not arduous. The work may involve the expenditure of much muscular energy, it is true, but what a man does as *dókpwè* is performed to the accompaniment of the rhythms of the *dókpwè* work-songs, while the fact that his fellows are watching him is a never-failing drive. Then, too, no one individual works for too long a stretch, for one man relieves the next who, while he rests, joins in the singing before he again takes his place. To climax the occasion is the feast, where quantities of relished food, which the day's sponsor of the work provides as plentifully as he is able, are spread before the workers. For no small measure of social prestige accrues to him who gives with an open hand, gaining as he does the reputation of having the means with which to provide bountifully.

Usually the work done is completed the same day, but if a house is to be thatched, a day's preliminary work is necessary to gather the thatching material. House thatching is the most complex work the *dókpwè* is called upon to do, for the preparation of a field is simple, involving only the hoeing, while building a wall likewise requires only the preparation of the earth and placing it in position. There are a number of steps involved in roofing a house, however, and this makes it necessary for the members of the *dókpwè* to do several different kinds of work, some bringing supplies, some preparing rope, some smoothing the bamboo poles, while others strip the palm ribs, or roughly sew the thatch into bundles. The erection of the ridge-pole and of the frame which holds the roof is the first task, this being followed by the erection of the interlacing frames of bamboo poles, the first set tied down at right angles to the ridge-pole, the second parallel to the ridge-pole and fixed to these others. Some men, whose duty it is to see that the supports of the roof are sufficiently strong so that it will not give way, must work from within the house, a hole being left in the roof for them to emerge. The *dokpwégã*, carrying his staff of office, walks about, giving orders to his assistants to transmit to the men, while each of the sub-groups names one of its members as head-

man and follows his orders, this being another instance of the rule that in Dahomey no group work is begun until a single responsible head is selected to direct it.

The competitive element enters again when the cross-pieces of palm-rib are laid on the heavy poles which reach down from the ridge to the wall itself. The technique of tying these securely is an involved one, and there is much rivalry to see who will be the first man to finish his section. The men actually work in pairs, one man on the ground supplying his partner on the roof with material. The rivalry between two especially competent men may be intense, and the cheering becomes shrill as they near the ridge-pole, while a great deal of laughter is heard at the expense of any laggard, and jeers reward the fellow who is last. After the palm-rib base for the thatch has been completed, the eaves must be made ready, and this is done by tying supplementary short poles and palm-ribs to the skeleton already in place. This occupies the entire forenoon, the actual thatching being begun after noonday.

Each team selects one side of the roof, and the bundles of thatch already prepared by the older men are gathered at the base of the wall. The men range themselves along the eaves while the lowest row of thatch is placed in position. When all is ready, those on the ground begin to throw the bundles of thatch to the men above, who place them on the roof several layers deep and tie them down. The progress toward the ridge-pole is accompanied by loud cries from those on the ground while the taunts of those who work faster make the noise deafening. The tense rivalry of a close contest does not change the basic good nature of the workers nor turn the banter to quarrelling. As the thatch covers the roof and nears the ridge-pole, the members of the *dókpwè* working on the other side come into view. Those who complete their portion first begin their songs, but it is not long before the other groups finish with their thatching, while below the preparations for laying out the food are well under way, for the men will not eat until the roof is completed—that is, until the ends of the thatch at the top are braided down to make a finished ridge. This done, all gather for the feast, and not until late afternoon does the *dókpwè*, under the guidance of its officials, troop home.

Cooperative work is not confined to the performance of the types of work which appertain peculiarly to the *dókpwè*, however. The practice among the iron-workers, for example, is for one smith to buy a quantity of scrap iron and keep it until such time as it is his turn to benefit from the labor of his fellows, for whom he has been working in the meantime.

When this time arrives, all the members of the forge convert the iron he has acquired into hoes, axes, bush-knives, and other salable goods. The owner of the iron then is free to sell these implements, and to keep the proceeds gained from selling them. This money he will use for living expenses and the purchase of scrap iron, meanwhile working for his associates, until it is once more his turn to have the use of the combined labor-power of his forge. One of their number is chosen as leader and arbiter and in this manner the work goes on without undue friction. Cooperative work of this sort is usually done by groups of persons who belong to the same sib and extended family. This fact, that the members of a forge are relatives, is accounted for in tradition by a tale which tells how one of the early kings directed several families—twenty men, twenty women—to become iron-workers, and how the descendants of these matings carry on the craft.

Among the weavers cooperative effort also obtains, the whole group working on the material of first one and then the other of the members, so that each member in turn becomes the owner of a large supply of cloths. The cloth workers live and work together and strict discipline prevails among them. It is said that only three groups of weavers are to be found in the whole of Dahomey, all of them in Abomey. The weavers, like the iron-workers, are related.¹ A chief, who heads the principal group, controls all the weavers. The designs are restricted, and a member of the guild must have permission of the chief to reproduce and sell a cloth of a given design, and must pay for the use of a pattern not invented by himself. An example of the control which is exercised in this group was witnessed when one of the cloth workers sold without authorisation one of the products of his loom. Great objection was voiced by the other members of the guild, and it was said at the time that this man would be fined for his offence. This same organisation and discipline characterises the groups of workers who appliqué designs on cloth, except in their case the conception of designs as an individual matter is more emphasized, and the ownership of these patterns is more jealously observed.

Pottery is fired and often marketed cooperatively. A woman who does not get on with the others of her group, particularly if she cuts her prices, is punished not only by having her stock of pottery broken by her associates, but also by being forced to work for a time without

¹ The fact that weavers are only found in Abomey was not verified, though none were seen elsewhere in Dahomey. In view of the extent to which cloths of European manufacture are worn, it would be quite possible that a relatively small group could today supply the entire demand for their product.

remuneration before she is re-admitted to all the privileges of the guild.

One may say, indeed, that this principle of cooperative work is to be found in all phases of Dahomean economic life. Yet exceptions are had in the instance of the jewellers and wood-carvers, who are regarded as artists rather than artisans. While men who follow these callings may perhaps work together—in the case of the jewellers, the forges are grouped much as those of the iron-workers—they are not subject to control as to the time they work, what they produce, how they sell their handiwork, or what prices they obtain for them. A man's creations are his own and he neither takes kindly to direction nor works without manifesting jealousy toward the products of others.

The wood-carver is even more of an individualist than the jeweller, and in consequence is not esteemed a dependable individual; the women say that marriage to one of them affords a precarious existence, for these carvers do not bend their energies to providing well for their families.¹ There are very few professional wood-carvers, most of the carving being produced outside the economic field—carvings that are not sold, but made for the pleasure of the carver and either used by him or given as gifts. Considered from the point of view of Dahomean economics, then, wood-carving is only of minor importance. It is significant, however, in that it offers an example of individualism in a society so highly organized as is that of Dahomey.

¹ The individualism that characterizes the Dahomean artist will be discussed below in the section dealing with art. See especially vol. ii, pp. 363-365.

Chapter V

PROPERTY

In a civilisation where the pecuniary motive bulks large, and where the acquisition and ownership of wealth is important in assuring a man his place in society, it is natural that the concept of property should be highly developed. In the kingdom of Dahomey, three principal categories of ownership were found; today two of them are fully in force, while the third exists only ideally in the reminiscences of the men who lived during the existence of the monarchy. This third type of ownership comprised the property of the King, and because it was so vast, it must be discussed before the other two classes of property can be considered.

In pre-conquest Dahomey, the property of the King was theoretically limited only by the limits of Dahomey itself. It is for this reason that land is held by the person who at a given time actually uses it,¹ for the ultimate title to all land was conceived as vested in the King. Indeed, all the goods owned by any Dahomean—houses, implements, slaves, or money, as well as his person—were thought of as ultimately belonging to the King.²

As is usually the case in African cultures where this theory of ultimate ownership of property by a King prevails, it was no more than an idealized concept. For, in fact, the King of Dahomey would never have presumed to assert his theoretical right. In actuality, he was head of the state and, as such, was a very wealthy man. As will be seen, he had judicial powers of the broadest character, and it was thus possible, in instances of given individuals who had been accused of crime, for him to impose fines or other penalties which were confiscatory. Similarly, as executive of the state, it was possible for the

¹ Even at the present time no land, with a few specific exceptions, is privately owned, the situation being largely what it was when Burton wrote, "The tenure of land throughout the empire is in 'fee-simple,' allodium, as amongst us, being unknown." (Vol. ii, p. 165).

² Compare with Le Herissé's statement (p. 243), "Sous le régime de la monarchie dahoméenne, le droit de propriété mobilière et immobilière n'existait, dans toute sa plénitude, que pour le roi."

King, through his ministers, to assess each Dahomean a considerable portion of his property in the form of taxes. However, such revenues were principally devoted to the discharge of obligations incurred in the administration of the state, such as equipping the army with guns and gunpowder, provisioning the troops, paying the officers of the King, and maintaining the royal household. Furthermore, the King, as representative of the nation, was obligated for the heavy expenses necessary to invoke the gods and the deified ancestors for the safety of Dahomey. But, as suggested, while the King of Dahomey was theoretically the sole owner of his kingdom, he was too practised a politician not to realize how impolitic it would be to assert this ownership; and although no body of living men could limit his power except by indirection, the codes imposed by the royal ancestors did act as restraining factors against too flagrant abuses. To all intents and purposes, then, he can be regarded as having been the wealthiest and most powerful Dahomean, a man who was possessed of broad powers of administering the kingdom, which assured him of great revenues.

The actual property of the King consisted first of the money and goods which he obtained from revenues; second, of the estates which were operated for him by his overseers; and third, of the slaves which he took for himself after each successful campaign. That the King was careful to give at least nominal recognition to the property-rights of others is evident from the manner in which he acquired these slaves after a conquest. In all Dahomey slaves might be owned only with his consent. He was not willing, however, to expose himself to the operation of hostile supernatural forces that might resent his victory over an enemy, and his acquisition of their land. When the army went to war, therefore, although he was the supreme commander, he gave way to his commanding general, sitting on a lower stool than the general, and impersonating in guise and deportment a common soldier. When the conquest was over and each soldier brought the captives he had taken to the palace, a sum of five cauries was given the captor for each slave before these captives were surrendered to the representative of the King. Sometimes, too, if a man by exceptional valor had captured a large number of persons, his efforts would be recognized by promotion, and the gift of a slave. But every soldier received at least his five caury-shells for each captive, because by paying the warrior this symbolic purchase price, the King felt absolved from the recriminations of any supernatural agents who watched over the destinies of the captives. And though the incentive to this trans-

action was religious rather than economic—the title given the ceremony was “the King washes his hands”—the fact remains that a money-payment was considered essential to the change in ownership of the captives.¹

Another example of how the monarch recognized the rights of his subjects is seen in the ownership of land. It has been stated that title to all Dahomean land was vested in the King. An indication of the extent to which this was the case is had in the tradition that at the death of a person, a special cloth must be given the King, to pay him for the land on which a person is buried.² Yet it was also necessary for the King, on his enstoolment, to distribute large quantities of cauries to his people. Each person, of course, received only a few shells, but these symbolized the purchase of the land from the people to remain the property of the reigning monarch until his death.³

At the present time the property of the royal family is held in trust for the members of the sib, as a group, by the head of the royal sib. Such property as the large groves of palm-trees in various parts of Dahomey are of great economic value and annually bring a considerable sum into the coffers of the royal sib. When transactions are translated into French francs, the royal sib is not only wealthy in terms of European money, but the individual members of this sib, many of whom are local chieftains, also have amassed not inconsiderable fortunes.

The second general category of property, under which the first partially falls since post-conquest days, is sib property. Besides the royal sib there are some thirty or forty other patrilineal relationship groupings.⁴ Each of these is headed by its oldest living male member, and to this head is entrusted the administration of the sib property. As in the case of the royal sib, property in this category is mainly in the form of palm-groves.⁵ In addition to its palm-trees, the sib also considers as its property certain lands which are held for ancestral shrines. Such lands are not regarded as wealth, however, but rather as appurtenances of the ancestral cult. These two items complete the types of sib property.

¹ This ceremonial payment is described in almost all the contemporary accounts of Dahomey, from the time of Snelgrave.

² See below, p. 386.

³ Cf. the discussion of this point by Le Herissé, pp. 243–245.

⁴ See below, Ch. IX and X.

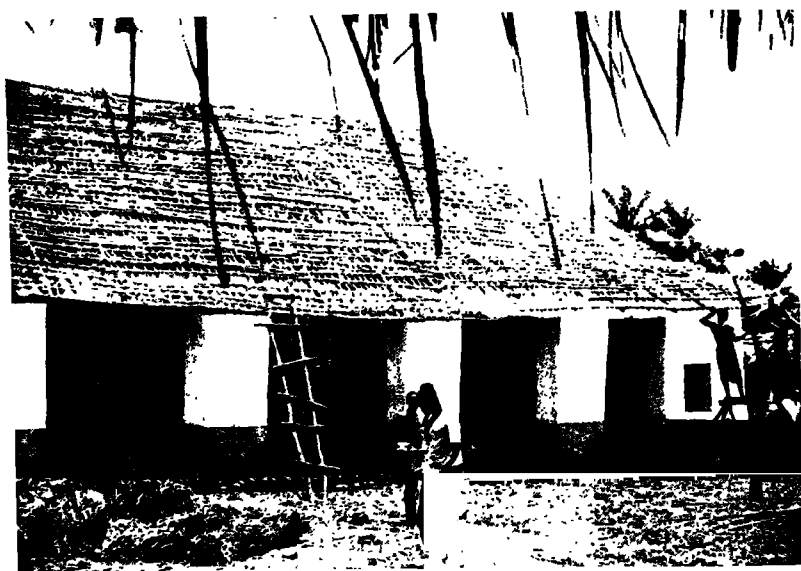
⁵ The mechanism by which these groves are retained in the family from one generation to the next will be discussed later, when the inheritance of property is considered. See below, pp. 92–94.



a) One task of the Dókpwè is the thatching of roofs; arranging the materials.



b) Each phase of the work is a contest; placing the framework.



a) Completing the frame for the thatch.



b) Beginning the thatching; each man on the roof has a helper on the ground who keeps him supplied with thatch.



a) Dahomean weaving is of the strip variety.



b) A master jeweller at his forge.

Plate 19



a) The wood-carver is the outstanding individualist in the regimented civilisation of Dahomey. Fashioning a statuette with an adze.



b) The carver regards his piece to see that the proportions are satisfactory.

This means that the ownership of a very large proportion of the wealth of Dahomey is in the hands of individuals and, in consequence, there is the third category, which comprises private property, whose ownership may be in the hands of men or women. This category includes all manner of goods. Thus, the compound a man builds is his property; the trees he plants belong to him; the money he earns is his to dispose of as he pleases; the utensils he buys are his, as are the cloths a man possesses, his guns, the mats he uses, his pipes, his tableware, and the like. Above all, the property he is most careful of is his money. This he keeps in some secret place, and since he will not ordinarily entrust it to a locked container in his house, he buries it under a tree. Tales abound of reputedly wealthy persons who, fearing to entrust this knowledge to another, had died leaving their heirs in ignorance of the place where they had secreted their wealth. The property owned by women differs from that owned by the men principally in the matter of personal belongings. A woman, for example, owns cooking pots and other culinary utensils rather than a gun or a bush knife. Like the men, the women prize their collections of cloths which are worn on special occasions, and in the case of both men and women who are initiate members of the various cult-groups, a part of their goods consists of the ceremonial regalia required of them as devotees.

Magic charms form another type of personal property. As has been noted, these charms, which include herbs and other medicines, are held by tradition to have been revealed chiefly to hunters in the bush. When a hunter had learned how to make a given charm, or had been taught how to use a certain leaf to cure some disease, this knowledge was then his property and had salable value. When he was sought out for a charm to achieve a specific purpose—to protect a man on a journey, or to make of him a successful trader, or to insure the death of an enemy—if the hunter detailed the contents of the charm, how to put the ingredients together, the situation in which it would become effective and any formulae necessary to set it in operation, this knowledge then became the property of the purchaser as well as the vendor; and if the former desired, he might re-sell the knowledge of how to make this particular charm to others, so that a charm, once bought in this manner, became a potential object of gain. This is the traditional concept of how the knowledge of the use of charms was spread; today it is not generally known what charms an individual possesses, and a person who wishes to acquire one does not ask the

names of those who might have it, but ordinarily goes to a professional dealer in these supernatural aids and from him buys what he needs. To the professional dealers in charms, then, these comprise a stock in trade that is their property and potential wealth; for others, while the charms they own are property, they do not represent a source of income.

Slaves were held as personal property, though not so widely as other forms, since the slaves acquired in the course of a conquest were the property of the King and either worked his plantations, or in the early days were sold to slave-dealers to provide the funds with which European goods were bought. Some slaves were given to those who were favorites of the King, however, or to those who had attracted his attention by rendering him some outstanding service. Such slaves could not be sold without the permission of the King. Slaves purchased outside the kingdom might be sold more freely, for these were private property in the strict sense of the word.

Light is thrown on the implications of the ownership of private property when the matter of debts and the giving of pawns as surety for their payment is considered. As in all of West Africa, this institution was an important one. It is said that the custom of giving persons in pawn exists at the present time, though it is difficult, in view of the attitude of the French government toward anything that approaches slavery in any way, to obtain information concerning the extent to which pawning is now practised. It was possible, however, to obtain a somewhat detailed account of the procedure attendant upon pawning during the time of the Dahomean monarchy, and this may be recounted here without any implications that this system is followed at the present time. The pawn was called *gbánù*, and was given by a man when he was in need of funds. The case of a father of several children, who through some unfortunate occurrence had incurred a heavy fine may be taken as an example. Unable to raise the necessary sum, this man would go to another for the amount he needed, and he would give the lender one of his children as a pledge. The transaction was consummated in the presence of the village chief and his first assistant, who acted as witnesses, the money being counted and a date being set for repayment of the loan in their presence. It must be emphasized that a slave was never given as a pawn, for to give a slave was regarded as indicating a lack of confidence. Similarly, the head of a sib had no right to pawn the children of his siblings. Even though he had full power to call the members of his sib to work for him, if it were necessary for him to pawn a child in order to obtain funds, he could only give

one of his own children. The debt carried no interest charges, for the work of the pawn in behalf of the lender was regarded as sufficient to cover this. A pawn not old enough to work was not acceptable. When the time came for repayment, the borrower and lender presented themselves before the chief, and the exchange of the sum borrowed for the pawn was made.

In the event the debtor was not prepared to pay the sum due, an extension could be granted and in this case the child remained with the lender. However, if the pawn was a girl, as was usually the case, and there was too much delay in repaying the debt, the lender might claim the girl in payment. In this instance, the pawn became a full-fledged wife of the lender, and the debt was regarded as taking the place of the sum which must be given in certain types of marriage by a suitor to his father-in-law.¹ The creditor, with his village chief, would go to the chief of the debtor's village, and the two chiefs would then pronounce the marriage a regular one between the lender and the girl. The question arises, however, as to what would be done were the pawn a son. If the debt were not repaid after extensions had been granted, three alternatives might be followed. In the first case the debtor would agree to have the sum he owed doubled, and would give to his creditor a second son, setting a new date when the increased amount was to be repaid. The second alternative also involved the giving of a second mature son, but in this case the lender would specify how much work must be done for him before he would consider the debt discharged and liberate the boys held as pawns. Thus if the creditor were a farmer, he might calculate the number of rows that must be hoed to equal the sum he had loaned.² If such an agreement were made, the debtor, if he could afford it, would bring a *dókpwè* to do a large proportion of this work. If the parties to the debt resorted to the third alternative, the two village chiefs estimated the number of rows which must be done to repay the sum owed, and then calculated the number of days necessary for a man to do this amount of work. The pawn was thereupon at the disposal of the lender for this period of time, and at the end of it was released; it made no difference whether he had been employed in the fields or in doing other work, for when the number of days in this term of service was over, his father's debt was considered discharged.

¹ See below, pp. 302ff., for the forms of marriage in which this payment occurs.

² At the present time, the rate of pay is about two francs for hoeing two hundred rows.

What treatment was accorded the pawn—what assurance was there that the creditor would care for the pawn working for him? Since his only profit resulted from the amount of work accomplished by his pawn, was it not to his interest to obtain as much work as possible without regard for his health? That abuses undoubtedly occurred in the system of pawning cannot be denied, but there were, apparently, certain checks on uncontrolled exploitation of a pawn. The distinction between a pawn and a slave was very clear, and public opinion did not regard kindly the man who abused his pawns, for pawning was something to which any Dahomean might at any time be forced to have recourse. Another check existed in the regulation that if a pawn died before he had fulfilled his obligation, the debt was cancelled.

If the person who had loaned money died, the pawns he held were released. However, after the funeral ceremonies, his heir would go to the head of the village, who would call the debtor and require him to acknowledge the debt. This done, the pawn was returned to the son of the original creditor. When a debtor died, the creditor sometimes profited greatly. In the first place, if the amount borrowed was not known to the heirs of the deceased, or if it was not known that he had given a child as a pawn, the creditor had an obvious advantage. In ordinary cases, where these things were of common knowledge, the sons of the deceased repaid the debt, and the pawn was returned. However, pawns were often given secretly to creditors who lived some distance away, and if for some reason the member of the family who had knowledge of the debt refrained from speaking, then the pawn, even if a daughter, continued to remain with the creditor. Sometimes the family did not trouble to regain the security, and in this case the child continued to work for the creditor, who, if the pawn were a girl, would eventually marry her. It might be asked why the chief of the village in whose presence the debt had been incurred did not speak in such cases. Dahomean ethics dictate that a chief must not divulge knowledge unless directly questioned about a specific matter.

The status of pawning at the present time may be considered further. It was said that while children are occasionally pawned even now, the principal types of pawning found today are those in which a man pledges himself for a debt, or in which he pledges a palm-grove. When a man pawns himself, it becomes a question of working off the debt with his own labor. If he is assiduous, he may be freed in a reasonable time, but if he is not thrifty and continues to borrow from his creditor,

he may work for his creditor all his life. When a palm-grove is tendered as a pawn, the annual yield is calculated. If, let us say, a grove provides an income of five hundred francs a year, the owner pledges it at an interest rate of two hundred and fifty francs. The other half of the yield goes to the lender as a return on the principal of his loan and the debt is cancelled in the number of years necessary to repay it at the rate of two hundred and fifty francs annually, whereupon the palm-grove is returned to the owner.

Still another problem in the consideration of private property arises from the fact that certain goods and services must be given by a man to the father of his wife before marriage is consummated, if he is to control his children. This leads at once to the question that has so troubled Africanists in recent years, whether or not wives may be regarded as property, and whether or not it may be stated that a man purchases his wife. In recent years the terms "dowry," "bride price," "bride wealth," have all been suggested.¹ If it be asked whether or not, in Dahomey, a wife is regarded as property, as something purchased in the same way that a domesticated animal or a utensil is purchased, a negative answer must be given, even though the popular phrasing exists that a man who has many daughters is wealthy. Daughters marry, and the gifts and services given by a man's sons-in-law go far to increase his resources. This is perhaps the only sense in which it can be said a man profits from his daughters' marriages or "owns" his family. Indeed, the "purchase price" actually tendered by a bridegroom to his prospective father-in-law includes much that is ceremonial in character and of little intrinsic value, for the financial obligations the young man assumes are rather to be envisaged in terms of those duties and services mentioned above than as an actual sum given to the father of his wife. It is not unprofitable to discuss with native Dahomeans this concept of wives as wealth resulting from purchase. The clearest expression was perhaps obtained from a man who is thoroughly conversant with European practice, and who, of his own accord, compared the sum given by a bridegroom to the French dowry. "As the Europeans see it, we seem to buy our wives. However, as we regard it, it is no more a sale than is the French dowry, where it might be said a man was selling himself to his father-in-law for a dowry in return for taking a daughter off his hands."

What sanctions governing marriage shed light on this problem? First of all, it is the wife who enjoys the right to divorce her husband;

¹ Cf. the extended discussion of this subject in *Man*, vols. xxix, xxx, xxxi.

as will be seen, a man is not free to divorce his wife. Again, that women are in no sense property as, for example, a slave was property, is further evidenced by the fact that a woman retains the right to all her personal earnings in the market-place, or to the proceeds of whatever she produces by her own efforts or to whatever she inherits from her own family. Instances, moreover, have been known where a woman has met a substantial part of the expense of obtaining a new wife for her husband, or has actually sustained all the cost of getting a wife for one of her own sons. Perhaps the question of whether or not the head of a family owns his wives and children might best be resolved for Dahomey if the answer were stated somewhat in this form: When a man pays for his wife, he does not own her, but he compensates his wife's people for their renunciation of any offspring resulting from the mating. Thus the transaction may be said to become a kind of sale of a potential source of wealth, the numerical enlargement of the husband's family and sib, or even of potential wealth in the ability of a man's unborn sons to work and the prospect of his unborn daughters to marry. It must be emphasized that the Dahomeans rarely think in these terms, and that statements such as these were elicited only after extended conversations on the subject with persons of an analytical turn of mind. For in the Dahomean family the relationships are preponderantly human and not economic. In short, although the economic motif bulks large in the life of Dahomey, the Dahomeans can in no measure be regarded as an example of the "economic man" whose behavior is ruled only by motives of material self-interest.

Property may be acquired in two ways: it may be earned or it may be inherited. The force of economic motivation and the tradition of the importance of hard work are of sufficient vitality to make little difference how much a man inherits, for he is always on the alert to increase his wealth, and accepts as a challenge the dictum that a worthy man hands down to his children more than he himself has received. A constant struggle to increase patrimony, and to earn property for one's self is therefore an outstanding aspect of the Dahomean attitude toward life.

This acquisitive urge is consciously fostered among both boys and girls at an early age. Small boys help their fathers in the field, and as soon as they are old enough to wield a hoe spend late afternoons and evenings making fields for themselves where they grow crops that they can dispose of to the market women of the family. By teaching and example it is constantly impressed upon them that the greater

the initiative the more the gain. A young man who shows evidence of a special talent need not follow his father's calling but may apprentice himself to a weaver or an iron-worker, or, if he has special aptitude, to a diviner, though it is not easy for one born outside the guilds to learn a craft. Should he apprentice himself to one of the craftsmen or to a priest or a diviner, he works for his father a half day and for his master the rest of his time so that when he is an adept at his chosen profession he commands an additional source of income. When of age, a man constantly attempts to add to his wealth by cutting new fields and planting more palm-trees. If he has the resources he can, in addition, command the work of others or the fruit of their palm-groves by lending some of his surplus to those who have need of ready money.

Little girls of nine and ten take cakes or sweetmeats prepared by their mothers to the market-place to sell, or go about the city vending their petty wares—a little salt, a few pieces of sugar, some fried yams—amassing enough money to buy a cloth. They continue as market women after they are married, and often one hears of women who are independently wealthy. It will be made evident when marriage forms are discussed how a successful woman can start a household of her own which may in time become a powerful lineage in Dahomean society.

The more important medium for the acquisition of property, as far as the individual is concerned, however, is inheritance.¹ Fascinated as the Dahomeans are with legalism and precedent, a trait they hold in common with other African societies, it is understandable why so much emphasis is given to problems of inheritance, both because of the importance of this mechanism for transmitting economic goods to the next generation, and because of the bitter quarrels that occur in the partitioning of an estate. Inheritance is based upon the prevalent patrilineal form of social organisation, and succession passes from a man to one of his sons. The son who inherits his father's is not necessarily the eldest, but the one chosen by his father as best fitted. The heir receives only a certain proportion of his father's property but, subject in the days of the kingdom to the King's consent, takes his father's name and place in society, becoming the head of a compound or of an extended family and assuming whatever other place of social importance the father may have held. The heir also takes over control of such property as was held by his father in trust for any of

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, pp. 249–254.

his relatives. Most important in determining the heir is the will of the dead man, which is ascertained by means of a ceremonial following the funeral of the deceased. To be understood, this must be discussed in the light of the Dahomean institution of the best friend.¹

Custom decrees that the best friend of a deceased man or woman state the will of the dead to the survivors. Naturally, the identity of the best friend is known to the family, since the two friends spend much time together, and since there are certain occasions, as at funerals of close relatives, where they make a ceremonial appearance.² Furthermore, before death a man usually instructs his family to inquire of his friend, whom he names, about his wishes concerning the disposal of his property. Finally, on the first day after a man's death, the best friend must be called in to dress the body of the deceased. Thus is made known ceremonially, and beyond repudiation, the one empowered to detail the terms of the oral will.

A man does not wait until he becomes critically ill to speak to his friend of his plans about his future heirs, but tells in the normal course of intimate conversation which of his sons he has selected as his successor, and what disposition he wishes to make of his property and his wives after his death. A best friend is often told where his friend's money is buried, and where any other valuables he may possess have been concealed. There is no fear of betrayal, for their friendship has been of long duration, often dating back to their boyhood, and has been tested through all the critical periods of their lives. As an indication how close such friendships are held to be, the illustration was often cited that under the old regime, when a person who had committed a crime escaped, the expedient for capturing him was to imprison his best friend. This did not mean that the authorities expected a betrayal of friendship, but that when word of the detention and torture of his friend reached the fugitive, he would give himself up. Stories are told of how even the King had his best friend, whom he would visit under cover of night, and with whom he would discuss his problems until break of day.

Thus, after the conclusion of the cycle of funeral rites and the performance by a best friend of the intricate ceremonies of friendship, the relatives of the deceased ask this friend to come to them. He arrives accompanied by drummers and singers. A stool is brought for him, and when he is seated and the family of the dead are assembled before him, he speaks:

¹ See below, pp. 239-242.

² See below, pp. 361 f.

"My friend kept a pipe for me in this house. Smoking our pipes, I mine, he his, we thought our thoughts. He said that when he would no longer be here I should come for my pipe. Give me, then, my pipe.

"One day, when my friend was alive, I was drenched by rain on my way to visit him, and he gave me a large cloth to change for my wet one. This cloth is still here in the house. He said that when he would no longer be here I should come and get the cloth that he had given me. Give me my friend's cloth...."

In the same manner he asks for his breeches, his blouse, his mat, the calabash from which he drank when he came to visit his friend, the plates they used when they shared a meal. All of these are given him. Now he calls the son whom his dead friend had named as heir. He sets him apart from the other children, and asks them if their father had spoken to them of this son. They reply, "No. But he told us before his death we must listen to your words." And to this the best friend answers, "It is this child who, from today, must represent his father and my friend. For I came here to drink with my friend, but I did not find him. Now I shall go back to my home. On the day the family assembles to divide the inheritance, I will return."

The friend thereupon leaves, taking with him the things he has claimed from his dead friend's house. A few days later the relatives of the deceased gather once more. If a considerable inheritance has been left, the head of the sib is present. When the best friend of the deceased arrives and is seated, the family places before him a plan for dividing the estate and ask whether or not this is in accordance with the division planned by his dead friend. If it is satisfactory, the estate is divided as proposed; if not, the plan is changed. In any event, all personal property is allotted by the dead man's friend. He may say, "The one who is here no longer told me that such a one (naming a son, let us say) did not work well"—and this person gets little. Or, he states, "My friend told me that this son (naming another) is the one who knows where his money is buried." If a woman was betrothed to the deceased and her dowry was only partially paid, the friend mentions the son who must assume this obligation and eventually marry her. Where there is no serious disagreement between the plan of the family and that presented by the friend, or even when some change is made by the friend in the family's plan, the word of the best friend is taken as final.

However, the division of an estate in a manner as simple as this, especially when the deceased was a man of wealth, does not often occur. Thus when a man having named an heir changes his mind, the

result is a series of acrid disputes and sharp controversies, which engender bitter enmity and lifelong feuds. Ordinarily, a man while living makes public announcement of his successor. At times it happens, however, that the prospective heir disappoints his father; he may become shiftless, or he may show other signs of unfitness for the succession. Yet to renounce him publicly would bring shame on the family, so that he is allowed to continue in the belief that he is his father's heir. At the same time, the father does not neglect to call another son secretly, to tell him of his decision to change his heir, and as a token gives him a ring or bracelet or some other object. He also tells his best friend what he has done, and publicly informs his family that the son who possesses the token, which he names, is to succeed him. Finally, having given this token to his newly chosen heir, he takes it back again after a few days, and gives it to his best friend. When the time for the ceremony of announcing the will of the dead man arrives this son is then named by the best friend as the real choice of his father, and is given the token to be exhibited as proof. The son who was first named as heir, however, seldom renounces his rights without a bitter struggle.

When the succession is disputed, the sib to which the deceased belongs holds a special council, to which all three of the friends of the dead man are invited to come and be questioned. The best friend speaks last, and swearing by the body of the dead man that he will tell the truth, he recounts, as exactly as he can, what had passed between himself and his friend concerning his friend's successor. The three friends leave, and the council begins its deliberations.

The total inheritance is first arrived at, and that part of the estate which represents money or land held in trust by the deceased as head of his compound or extended family is put aside. What remains after the portions held in trust have been segregated is divided into two parts, not necessarily equal. One of these is for the son who is to be designated as heir, the other to be divided among the remaining children. The wives of the deceased are next summoned, and those to be cared for by the new head of the family are designated. The cloths belonging to the dead man are likewise divided into two parts, one for the successor of the deceased, the other for the rest of the children. They now call the children of the wives of the dead man, and each in turn is asked to name the one of the two candidates who in his opinion is best fitted to succeed his father, and each gives his choice and his reasons for it. All of the children, both male and female, have

a voice in this proceeding, and when all have spoken, the head of the sib dismisses them, with the request that they return in three days.

When they reassemble, a diviner is called. Whether this diviner is himself a member of the sib, or whether, as is often the case, his decision is "controlled" by neutral diviners, selected by the parties to the dispute, who check the findings of the one actually querying Fate, will vary according to individual circumstances. The names of the two contestants are put before the diviner, and the one chosen by the lots he throws is named head of the compound, even if this is contrary to the last decision of the dead father. In this case, the one named by the best friend as his father's choice separates himself from his paternal compound, taking with him his own property, including whatever goods his father may have given him during his lifetime. If the result is acquiesced in by the family, the usual division of property is made, and the case is considered closed.

Sometimes, however, there is dissatisfaction with the verdict of Destiny, and when the division of the estate is begun, more especially when the wives of the deceased are apportioned to his sons, many of the brothers and sisters of the rejected heir leave the compound of their father with him and join the new compound he establishes. The fathers-in-law of the dead may also threaten to divorce their daughters from the heir named by the diviner, stating that when alive the dead man had told them the rejected son would care for their daughters, and expressing lack of confidence in the son to whom their daughters have been entrusted. Should they carry out their threats, the head of the family would have fewer wives than he should enjoy as head of a compound, and this would endanger the prospects of continuing, to say nothing of increasing, the size of the family by the birth of children to these women. Since to replace these wives with others would be expensive, a dilemma is posed which can only be avoided by following the will of the deceased.

Another family council is thereupon convoked to resolve the matter. If the son chosen by Fate to head the compound is older than the one named by the best friend of the deceased, the family remove the older, giving him rights of seniority described below. Once the younger son has taken over the succession, the fathers-in-law who had registered objections are satisfied, and he takes the wives and all the property which have been set aside for the head of the compound. The sib-head divides into two parts the palm-groves of the grandfather of the two

disputants, giving one part to the heir and one to the older son while this rejected older son is also appointed to head a new compound formed by the division of the old one into two parts. On the other hand, if the son named by the friend is the older party to the contest, then the younger is simply replaced by the older without dividing the compound or giving the younger the headship of a new one, according to the principle, "the right of the elder must be respected."

With the question of the succession settled, and the trusteeship of such family and sib property as the deceased was charged with supervising placed in the hands of the heir, that part of the estate that had been set aside for division between the other children is apportioned. The father's cloths are given to sons and daughters, the former taking the large ones, the latter the small. His money is divided into three equal portions, one for the daughters and two for the sons. Among the daughters the oldest takes a little more than any one of the others, and the remainder is divided equally; the sons make equal division of their allotment.

Though wives are not property, the manner in which they pass from a man to his heirs may be briefly described at this point. If there are more sons than wives, then beginning with the oldest, each takes one until all have been apportioned, the youngest sons getting none. If there are more wives than sons, every son will get at least one wife, and some more, though this is also regulated by age. Thus, if at the death of a chief, let us say, there are twenty sons and sixty-three wives, the oldest three would each acquire four wives, the rest three each. In dividing the wives of the deceased, the head of the sib secretly consults the diviner, who designates to what particular man each wife who survives the deceased is to go. A man never inherits his mother, though an old woman comes to live with her son, being "inherited" only as a matter of form.

To return to the inheritance of specific categories of property, the manner in which palm-groves are handed down must be separately considered, since these go according to special rule. Palm-trees are not divided among the daughters at the time of their father's death, because in the ownership of permanent property of this kind, women are not counted as members of their father's family. The palm-groves are divided into two parts, not necessarily equal, the first being given to the successor of the dead man, and the second to the son next in age to the heir. The fact that neither of these portions is regarded as the private property of the man who holds them must be emphasized.

The first is placed at the disposal of the head of the compound and extended family or sib, to make it possible for him to live in a manner befitting his position, while the second is reserved to provide funds to defray the expenses of ceremonial observances of the ancestral cult, and for emergencies of various kinds within the family group as, for example, when a fine which surpasses the resources of an individual member must be paid, or when a man does not have enough money to permit him to marry.

When these two men die, the palm-groves with which they have been entrusted move into the class of family property, and now the daughters have a right to their share, the trees being divided among the surviving brothers and sisters of the two trustees. Again the division is not equal, for the sib head apportions the trees according to the age of the surviving children, the oldest receiving the largest individual share. Should there be surviving daughters, then the family asks the heads of the sibs to which the husbands of these women belong to give a daughter of each of these women to a man of the sib of the deceased owner of the palm-trees. Since in marriages where a man makes the stated ceremonial payment for his wife the children belong to their father's sib and are under his control, the children of these women who have inherited palm-trees from their brother would therefore not belong to the sib of their mothers, but to the sibs of their fathers. It follows, then, when a daughter of one of these women marries a son of the deceased man, that on her death her daughter by this man will inherit her palm-trees, and she, in turn, will bequeath these trees to a son, which will eventually bring them once again into the sib where they were originally owned.¹

An example will clarify the complicated character of this transaction. A man, A, dies. The palm-trees that he himself has planted are inherited by his two eldest sons, B and C. On the death of these two sons, A's surviving children, including one of his daughters then living, D (a sister of B and C), inherits some of these trees. D, being married, her children belong to the sib of her husband, and the trees allotted her would eventually go out of the sib to which A belonged. Hence A's sib proposes to the sib of the husband of D a marriage of the category "give us and we will give you," in which any marriage-

¹ The practice described here is in accordance with the Dahomean "first rule" of inheritance quoted by Le Herissé (p. 251), that "On n'emporte rien d'une famille dans une autre." The conclusion drawn, that "les femmes sont incapables d'hériter," is, however, not entirely correct, as has been seen.

payments required cancel each other.¹ On the death of D, she wills the portion of A's palm-groves she has inherited to a daughter, E, who is a wife of a grandson of A. E, in turn, holds the trees for a son, who is a member of A's sib. Hence though such palm-trees as D herself may have planted or may have acquired during her lifetime are divided equally among her children, the trees originally from A's palm-groves will go only to E, that daughter who has been married back into A's sib, and E in turn will bequeath these trees only to a son who himself is a member of A's sib. Should D be married under one of the "free categories" of marriage, where the father has no control of his offspring because he does not pay the marriage dues to his father-in-law, this complication in the inheritance of palm-trees does not arise. In such a case, since D controls her own children, she would give one of her daughters to a young man of her own sib without consulting the paternal grandparents of the girl, and the retention of the trees in A's sib would thus be assured.

Cattle are also inherited according to special rule. One part of the herd is given to the head of the sib, extended family, or compound of which the dead man was head, and the remainder is divided into two equal portions, one for the sons and one for the daughters, being distributed according to age. The head of the sib designates what portion of the herd is to go to the successor of the deceased, and though this portion is not a set one, it is not customary to have it equal as much as one-half of the total. No discussion of the manner in which a herd is distributed to the surviving children is permitted, since the decision is given by the head of the sib acting in his capacity as the representative of the entire group, and especially as one speaking for the deified ancestors of the sib.

The preceding discussion has been concerned with the inheritance of property left a by man—particularly a man of substance. However, it has been shown that women as well as men own property; that women often become wealthy in their own right. They have their best friends as do men, and though a woman's best friend plays neither as important a role in life nor after death as does the best friend of a man, yet in any crisis a woman's best friend would be called upon to aid her in the same manner as the best friend of a man. In elopements, for example, the best friends of the man and woman make the necessary arrangements, and seek to make the match possible despite the parental

¹ See below, pp. 312–313, for this type of marriage and its social and economic connotations.

veto. The settlement of the property of a deceased woman does not entail as elaborate ceremonial, nor does this require the same amount of time as that of a man who may be the head of a relationship group, principally because of the fact—which the Dahomeans emphasize—that there is rarely any quarrelling over the disposal of the property of a mother, even though a woman may leave a large estate. After the burial of a mother, the children go to her best friend to be told what their mother owned. When they ascertain the extent of their mother's possessions they themselves decide how her property is to be divided. No rule governs the matter; the division may be an equal one, or the children may agree that a daughter who is to represent her mother should take all the property. If there are no children, a brother inherits what the woman has left. The reason why the best friend of a deceased woman does not designate the wishes of the dead as carefully as that of a man is because of the relationship that obtains between a mother and her children, as contrasted to that between a father and his children. For in this patrilineal, polygynous society, one may share one's father with the children of many other women, but a mother is shared with none but those few brothers and sisters with whom one has both parents in common.¹ Thus in inheriting a mother's goods the children have no such difficulty in settling the estate as the children of the same father but of different mothers, who must adjust differences arising out of deep-rooted jealousies and a background of mutual antagonism.

¹ See below, pp. 153–155, for a more complete development of the implications of this fact.

Chapter VI

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSES IN DAHOMEAN SOCIETY

Despite the tradition that all must be workers, social classes whose members honored this tradition more in the breach than in the observance exist today as they had existed during the regime of the kings. In a sense the degree of regimentation of Dahomean society called into being, extended, and perpetuated a leisure class to direct and govern the producers. For it is a truism that density of population makes for a complexity of economic organisation, and that this, in turn, makes for an economic surplus that is translatable into social leisure. In Dahomey, a population numbering several hundred thousand persons supported the King and his court, the princes and their retinues, the priests and diviners, and provided for the elaborate ceremonials of state and of worship, as well.

The complexity of Dahomean economic life manifested itself in a high degree of specialisation, and as in all West African cultures, the presence of a money economy served to further this complexity. Before the overthrow of the kingdom, the money of Dahomey consisted of caury-shells. A number of contemporary writers have given the monetary system as they found it. Dalzel's "complete table of Dahoman monies, numbers, and weights, collected from the several authors," follows:

		<i>Value</i>			<i>Weight</i>		
		<i>No.</i>	s.	d.	lb.	oz.	tenths
" 40 cowries	1 tocky, or						
	strin	40	0	11 ¹ / ₅	0	1	7
5 tockys	1 galhina	200	0	6	0	8	4
5 galhinas	1 ackey	1000	2	6	2	10	0
4 ackeys	1 cabess	4000	10	0	10	8	0
4 cabess	1 ounce, trade	16000	40	0	42	0	0

Now from this ounce, weighing on experiment about 45 lb. troy, or 42 lb. averdupois, the weights in the last column are determined."¹

¹ p. 135.



a) A final scrutiny of the rough form.

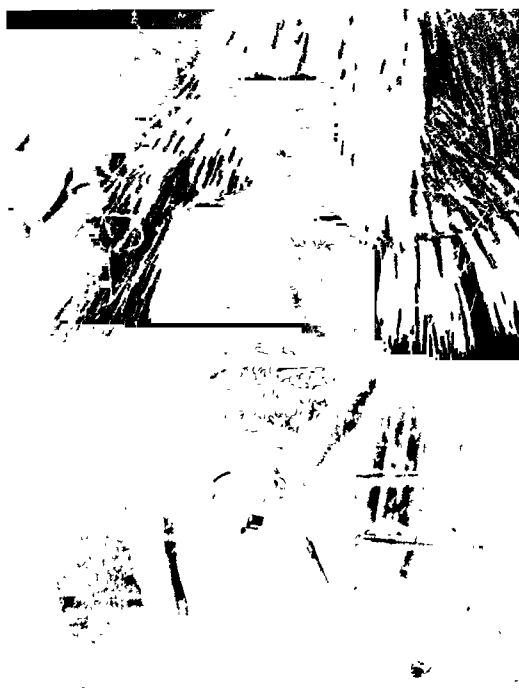


b) Finishing off the head with a small hand-knife.

Plate 21



a) Scene in a farming village



b) An elderly woman not of the upper social strata



a) A middle class mother and her child.



b) A group of middle-class folk.



a) The headman of a farming village.



b) The chief of the iron-workers' guild in Abomey.

M'Leod's table¹ coincides with that of Dalzel, but by the time of Forbes, the values in terms of metal had changed somewhat:

"The currency of the Dahoman kingdom is the cowrie shell, of which 2,000 are calculated to form one 'head' to which a nominal value of one dollar is attached. Such, however, is the scarcity of a metallic currency, that, in exchange, the silver dollar is eagerly taken at 2,400 to 2,600 cowries; and other metals, as well the lower as the higher, are freely taken in barter."²

These caury-shells were used for buying and selling in the markets; for at least partial satisfaction of tax levies, for the payment of fines, and for all other purposes for which, at the present time, the French franc is employed.

One aspect of the money economy in Dahomey was that it furthered the accumulation of wealth, for where wealth may manifest itself only in produce or in other types of goods, such accumulation is difficult. The existence of money made possible the ability to buy at will, to mobilize wealth expeditiously, and to manipulate it with ease for desired ends. All this is illustrated by the Dahomean leisure class; the King, the princes, the chiefs, the priests, and the diviners. None of these were productive in the sense that farmers or iron-workers or cloth-workers are productive workers, but there was appropriated to them the social surplus derived from the labor of the great mass of Dahomeans, and, more particularly in the days before the European conquest, from the work of the masses of slaves.

With a money economy at hand for the expression of wealth, a phenomenon common to human societies resulted—that of conspicuous consumption.³ Money was prized for what it would buy in terms of public display of the ability to command wealth. As might be looked for, this was particularly true in the instance of royalty, though it must not be thought that conspicuous consumption was confined to the rulers. When the Dahomean funeral ceremony is discussed in succeeding pages, the extent to which conspicuous consumption is found among all classes will be evident: "The funerals are impoverishing Dahomey," was the observation whenever the lavishness of the funerary rites was being described. Yet so important is it to make these extravagant expenditures—extravagant to the Dahomean—that much of a man's striving and toil goes toward assuring for himself

¹ pp. 90-91.

² Vol. i, p. 36.

³ This concept derives from the works of Thorstein Veblen, being best treated in his "Theory of the Leisure Class."

an elaborate and costly burial. That is to say, a man marries as many wives as he can that he may have numerous children; these, in turn, join as many societies as they can afford, to assure them of the necessary resources to support the demands upon them at the death of a parent or parent-in-law. Moreover, these very societies, in their character of mutual aid organisations, must be regarded essentially as groupings which insure the members against embarrassment on occasions where public expenditure is the rule. At a marriage ceremony, for example, when the husband of the bride, upon giving her the new name by which she is henceforth to be known, must provide generous gifts for his wife, and a lavish feast for his guests, he is "pushed," as Dahomean idiom has it, by the fellow-members of his society or societies with contributions of money.

Another instance is the relative generosity that marks the giving of gifts at the shrines of the gods during public ceremonies, even when the givers themselves are not directly concerned with the rituals, for, characteristically, public announcement is made of these donations.¹ More important is the case of the ancestral rites, believed to be demanded by the deified forefathers. These are prized by the community in which they take place according to their elaborateness which, to the Dahomean, is expressive of large expenditure; while family or sib prestige is maintained in proportion to the splendor and duration of the ritual. The same love of display is responsible for at least two Dahomean art-forms, the small brass figures and the appliqued cloths. These have, as their principal function, the decoration of the houses of men of position; phrased in economic terms, they proclaim the ability of their owners to spend their wealth on non-utilitarian objects.

To restate this, it will be seen that the economic organisation of Dahomean society exhibits a large degree of specialisation, accompanied by the production of an economic surplus that, through a process made easier by the presence of a money economy, has brought about the concentration of wealth in the hands of the members of the Dahomean leisure class. This group, in turn, has maintained its position through its ability to acquire much wealth, and its practice of dis-

¹ In Dahomey, as in other pecuniary societies, display of this nature is rationalized; thus, if asked the reason for the public announcement of gifts at religious rituals, the Dahomean will answer that this prevents peculation by the priests. See Burton, vol. ii, pp. 150-151, for a description of the flourish with which the King made proclamation of a gift presented by Burton at the annual "customs."

pensing this wealth as largesse, or in accordance with the socially valued canons of conspicuous consumption.¹

During the time of the monarchy Dahomean society was stratified into four economic and social classes. The first, the lowest both economically and socially, was that of the slaves.² Slaves were recruited almost entirely from war captives.³ They comprised the basic labor supply of Dahomey, and so important was it that their numbers be maintained at the required figure, that after every annual campaign—the Dahomean “wars” being, in large measure, essentially annual slave-raids—captives to the number necessary to replace those who had died, or had run away, or had been incapacitated were set aside before any were sold to traders, or given to favorites, or placed in the royal household, or sacrificed to the gods.⁴ The slaves had no legal rights, and while slavery in Dahomey was not the harsh regime that it became in the New World under the plantation system, it was far from the not unpleasant institution of the usual African type, where the slave is to all intents and purposes regarded as a member of the household. For, in discussing slavery, it must never be forgotten that Dahomean society was highly organized, and that its important motivations were pecuniary ones. Furthermore, the control exercised by the royal family tended to make slavery perhaps more closely akin to the slavery known in America and the West Indies than has been recorded in any other portion of Africa. The majority of slaves were herded onto the plantations of the King, where under the control of overseers whose duty it was to get the utmost yield from the fields,

¹ A description of the possessions of one of these wealthy Dahomeans may be quoted here from Forbes (vol. ii, pp. 175–176): “He has got an extensive domain at Whydah; secondly, a large farm at Torrec; thirdly, Whybagon; fourthly, Ah-grimeh; fifthly, Troo-boo-doo; sixthly, Carrnali; and, again a domain at Abomey. He is the owner of upwards of 1000 slaves, and as deep a villain as ever breathed.”

² On pp. 50–57, Le Herissé discusses Dahomean slavery in some detail.

³ Forbes, however, noting how the rapacity of the monarch discouraged too much display of initiative on the part of a private citizen, remarks (col. i, pp. 36–37), “If he brings more soil under cultivation, or in any manner advances his family to riches, without the license of the king, he not only endangers his fortune, but his own life and the lives of his family; instead of becoming a man of property and head of a family, he is condemned to slavery; and, serving his Majesty or his ministers, assists unwillingly to uphold the laws that have ruined him, his only alternative being death.” Le Herissé, p. 53, indicates how slaves might be acquired by purchase from slave-merchants who brought their human wares from the north. Prices were as follows: “Sous les premiers rois un homme se vendait 1,400 cauris, ce qui correspondrait maintenant à 7 sous; sous Ghézo 160,000 cauris soit 40 francs; sous Béhanzin un esclave se payait de 160 francs à 320 francs suivant son âge, son sexe, et sa constitution.”

⁴ Cf. Snelgrave, pp. 106–107.

they worked long and hard. This class of slaves was the most numerous, since it included also those who worked under a plantation system, but who, having been acquired through purchase or gift from the King, labored for chiefs and nobles, and these as the *gletanu* or great farmers, were essentially absentee landlords.

A second class of slaves was composed of those, particularly women, who were taken into Dahomean households. Here the situation of these slaves approximated somewhat more closely the accepted one of African household slavery. For these slaves there was, of course, the ever present danger that one or several of them might be sacrificed on the death of the master, so that his soul might have slave souls to serve him in the world of the dead. Nevertheless, certain men of this class rose to positions of power, and in the instance of women, the kings frequently took the most personable among them as wives and concubines. Indeed, it was said that the King often chose for his heir a son by a slave wife, since tradition maintains that a woman must be highly endowed to rise from the position of slave to that of a favorite of the King, and that, in consequence, the stock from which she came must of necessity be a desirable one.

Another group of slaves, in which any of the above might be included, figured not at all in the economic or social life, but were only used for religious purposes, being set apart for sacrifice. Chaudoin¹ describes a group of these unfortunate folk whom he met on the march. While it is true that the bloodthirstiness of Dahomean rulers does not seem, from contemporary accounts, to have been nearly as great as is usually thought, there is no question but that on stated ceremonial occasions large numbers of slaves were sacrificed.² It is even recounted today how, every morning, the King sacrificed two slaves whose souls, acting as the bearers of his word, transported his message of thanks to his ancestors for having vouchsafed him a good night's rest and allowed him to awaken to yet another day of life.

Nor must the slaves sold to the European traders be overlooked, since it might well be said that until slaving operations were suppressed, the surplus of slaves who could be sold out of the country constituted one of the primary resources of Dahomey. It was from the sale of these slaves—all of them the property of the monarch—that the King derived funds with which he bought the guns and gun-powder

¹ p. 196.

² Criminals were also included in this group, the death penalty being exacted during these ceremonies.

essential for military operations, the iron that was so much easier to work than that smelted from native ore, and the cloth that could be sewed into state umbrellas, ornamental hanging, chiefs' caps and other accoutrements of rank and position.

An intermediary group between the slaves and the free Dahomeans consisted of those born in Dahomey of slave parentage, or of slave and free Dahomean parents. None of these, by virtue of the fact that they had been born on Dahomean soil, could be sold. In the case of the child of a free and a slave parent, his situation depended much upon circumstances. He might become like those born of slave parentage or, especially when the free parent was the father and there were no other children, he might become free, and the heir of his father. The children of slave parents were, in the main, compelled to live on the estates of the owners of their parents; their position is most closely defined by the term "serf," and, though a portion of what they produced was theirs, the major part went to their overlords. Similarly, despite the fact that they might not be sold (though in times of emergency there was not too much scruple in adhering to this principle), they did not have the freedom of movement and the determination of their own existence that was accorded to the free Dahomean.¹

The third economic class of Dahomey included the free farmers and artisans who were the backbone of the Dahomean state. From this class the soldiers were drawn, it was this class which furnished the iron-workers, the weavers, the jewelers, the potters, and all of those who gave to Dahomey its variety of artists and craftsmen. It was from this class, also, that political as well as economic strength was recruited, for royalty, no less than the slaves, constituted a class apart, and it was only from the middle-class group that the King could draw the chiefs and administrators essential to the governing of his kingdom.² As will be seen when marriage ceremonies are considered, it was possible at any time for a young man of common family to be called to the edge of the bamboo strip that separated royalty from commoners, to be told to kneel, and to be offered the betrothal cup from the hands of a princess. Yet, on the other hand, once elevated to his chieftainship, he would not know when, through the introduction of a young prince-ling into his household, he might be gradually deprived of his

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, particularly pp. 54-56.

² Cf. Burton, vol. i, p. 219, for an account of how high position was actually achieved by a commoner; in this case Burton's "landlord" during his stay in Abomey.

prerogatives and find himself once more a member of his original class, and this time dependent on the generosity of the one who had supplanted him. This middle class furnished the priests in the temples, and from this group came also the diviners, while, finally, the vast majority of young men who formed the active membership of the *dókpwè* were also drawn from this stratum.

Atop the pyramided structure of Dahomean society was the leisure class, composed principally of the rulers—the men on whose shoulders lay the responsibility for the successful governing of the kingdom — and the ranking members of the priestly hierarchy. It numbered both men and women—men whose word was heard in council and who issued orders, women who were never heard publicly, but whose advice constantly guided the voices of those who rendered decisions. These people did no productive labor, or if they did engage in some labor, it was more as a matter of avocation than of primary occupation. While every Dahomean man must know how to cut a farm, men of this class had numerous slaves to do their farming, and while the “free” women constituted a significant factor in Dahomean economic life, those who were members of the leisure class were recruited in large part from the ranks of the princesses, and were thus either endowed with wealth by the head of their family, the King, or were cared for by other members of the royal family, who saw to it that they did not fall into want.

The economic rôle of the priests, like that of the rulers, was mainly one of consumption, as it is at the present time. Thus, as will be seen when the cult practices of Dahomey are discussed, every priest of importance has his cult-house. In this house novitiates live while they are instructed in the secret ritual of the cult. While in the cult-house they perform no labor, but are provided for by their fathers, their brothers, or their husbands or wives, if they are married. In addition to this, gifts are proffered to the priest in charge, while it is mandatory that a family from which a member is undergoing training in the cult-house furnish a young man to give fifteen days of labor in the fields of the chief-priest. Moreover, sacrifices are demanded by the god on ceremonial occasions or when supplicants come to ask for favors.] These sacrifices—animals, cooked foods of various kinds, mats and money—are given to support the shrine, and this includes the maintenance of those in attendance. It is not suggested that the priests are lacking in sincerity, or that they practise conscious exploitation of those who come to worship the deities for whom they

officiate; yet from the point of view of the economic system, they may not be regarded as producers of material goods.¹

With the fall of the kingdom in 1892, changes of far-reaching importance occurred in the economic and social organisation of Dahomean life. The first and most fundamental of these was the abolition of slavery, which cut off from the rulers and their subordinates the most immediate source of labor supply. At the same time, it must not be understood that this was completely achieved by the decrees of the occupation. Although today there are no slaves in Dahomey, it must nevertheless be recognized that under every chief there are considerable numbers of persons who give him half of every day's work, and who receive no compensation for it. These helots are the descendants of slaves who were released when the territory was conquered by the Europeans.²

In the inner life of the Dahomeans the distinction between slave and free ancestry is still a living one, and this is currently reflected in the everyday attitudes and behavior of those who today are the descendants of persons of the several classes of old Dahomey. Thus on visiting Da, formerly a slave village not far from Abomey, the manner in which the people scurried to their houses, frightened at the approach of strangers, spoke volumes, as did the behavior of the head-man who, with deep obeisance and with the greatest timidity, came to pay his respects to those descendants of the royal family who were present. On the other hand, the attitude of the members of the entourage of the nobles of the old regime—descendants of men and women who belonged to middle-class Dahomey—took on an imperiousness when directed toward the inhabitants of this village that was never manifested in their attitudes toward members of their own class who were of free-born Dahomean stock.

The descendants of those who were slaves are today mainly farmers, for practically no other occupation is open to them, since the craft-guilds are family guilds, where the outsider is but rarely accepted to serve the

¹ From another point of view, Dahomean society can be thought of as having been comprised of three classes, each of which was again divided into two. Thus, at the bottom were the slaves and serfs. Next came the middle class, with its division into those of actual middle-class status, and those who had been elevated to chieftainship. Finally, at the top, was the King and the princes and princesses, who again could be subdivided into those immediately related to the reigning monarch, and those who, while of royal blood, were descended from earlier kings and whose position might be regarded as merging into that of middle-class folk when the relationship to royalty was descent from one of the first monarchs.

² In return, they are accorded the protection of the chief for whom they work.

long apprenticeship necessary to become a master-craftsman. Some of the more enterprising descendants of slaves, by attaching themselves to the Whites and working for wages, have accumulated a sufficient reserve to enable them to set up small shops, to buy sewing machines with which they make clothing in the market-place, or in some other way to take up gainful occupations. However, this occurs only seldom outside such towns as are primarily for Europeans—in Cotonou on the coast, or in Bohicon, a commercial settlement a distance of some ten kilometers from Abomey itself. In the heart of Dahomey, where the native population has little contact with Europeans, such change of caste would be looked upon with disfavor by the upper classes.

What, then, has happened to the leisure class? Obviously, the functions of government which occupied this group during the time of the native rulers have been taken away from them by the French conquest. For a time one of the brothers of Behanzin was permitted to rule under French supervision, but the Dahomeans thought of him as a puppet King, and a traitor to his ancestors, so that by 1898 the monarchy had completely given way to a system of direct control by Europeans. The princes gradually adapted themselves to this system so that at the present time the great majority of the *chefs de quartiers* and subordinate officials under them are members of the old royal family.¹ Each of the quarters of Abomey, for example, is under the supervised rule of such a prince who, within certain limits, is permitted to administer justice, who controls men for work on the roads and other communal labor, and whose word in matters affecting their everyday life is as final to many of those under him as would have been the word of the King. These chiefs are held accountable by the *Commandant* of the district, and all serious matters must be referred to this European official. Yet in such aspects of life as the maintenance of position, the ownership and display of wealth, the lavishness of gifts and the obeisance paid by followers, the situation does not differ greatly from what it must have been in the days before the conquest. The chiefs are men of wealth. They have their farms and groves of palm-trees, and from these and their prerogatives as officials they derive ample revenue to meet their necessary expenses. The display at a gathering of chiefs today can only be described as brilliant. If

¹ Of late, military service in the French Army has become a prerequisite for appointment as chief; furthermore, the farther the distance from Abomey, the greater is the opportunity for a person of other than royal stock to obtain such an appointment.

automobiles have displaced hammocks borne by human bearers, it is merely because the automobile is the accepted expression of position and the ability to control wealth—this quite aside from the added convenience the automobile affords when it is necessary to cover the considerable distances between the seat of a chief and the Residency to which he must periodically report. According to accounts given by those who know both pre-conquest times and the present day, the state umbrellas are as ornately applied, the personal accoutrements of rank as beautiful, the silver, gold and brass ornaments in the houses of chiefs as numerous as in the days of the old régime. Many of the offices that existed under the kings but are no longer recognized by the French are continued, and these are filled by the members of what constituted the leisure class under the old system and are supported voluntarily by the Dahomeans in a manner that is far from unremunerative to them.

However, when the position of the members of the ruling class at present is compared to what it was before the conquest, this difference must be recognized. Chiefs are appointed by the French government, which means that to become a chief a man must meet requirements set up outside of Dahomey. One of the ways in which this new situation is being met is by education, the children of the chiefs being sent to schools and taught French. Another result has been that enlistment in the French army is identified in native thinking with going to war. Illustrative of this type of acculturation is a series of ritual welcoming dances which, performed in the old days when a prince had returned safely from a campaign, are today employed to welcome home a prince when he has completed his term of enlistment in the French army and returns to take his place once again in Dahomean society. For those sons who cannot become chiefs under the French—that number being obviously limited—there is trade, and one finds today that a good proportion of the small shops in Abomey, for example, are operated by persons of royal descent.

The life of the members of the other branch of the leisure class under the old régime, the priesthood, has been little changed by the conquest. Dahomey has witnessed no strong missionary activity, so that Christianity has had only the slightest effect on the beliefs of the people, and the shrines to the pagan gods exist as they always did. It will be seen in the section of this work devoted to that phase of Dahomean life how living is Dahomean religion. The priests no longer have a voice in the determination of political policy as they did have in pre-

conquest days, but the rôle they play in the everyday life of Dahomean folk is as important. The gifts and fees from which they derived their income, and the free labor that worked their fields and built their houses are provided for them today as in earlier times.

The daily round of the mass of Dahomeans who made up the middle stratum of Dahomean society goes on much as before. It is true they are not annually summoned to wars; that they are not taxed as heavily as in the days of the kingdom; that they are legally more free—if they know enough French to be aware of this freedom, and how to insure it for themselves. Economically, of course, they use European currency in place of caury-shells, and they are affected today by the action of world markets which determines the price they receive for their palm-kernels. Nevertheless, in their inner life, economic, social, and religious, there appears to be no significant difference between the present and when they lived under native rule.

Chapter VII

THE FISCAL POLICY OF THE KINGDOM

How the monarch exercised control over the life of the Dahomeans, and to what degree, will be documented here and in later chapters. That his control was not sporadic is manifest both in the accounts of travellers and of those given by natives at the present time. Yet most significant in this connection is the phenomenon of a native African kingdom with a system of taxation that might serve as a model for any modern despot, giving as it does a demonstration of how, among a non-literate people, a complex administrative machinery can be devised to collect the various levies and to safeguard the transfer of assessments destined for the monarch.

Perhaps the best summary of the control which the monarchy exercised over the lives of its subjects is that given by Burton:

"On the Gold coast, and about the Gaboon River and the South Coast, even a peasant will have his chair, table, cot, and perhaps boxes for goods. Here he never dreams of such ownership. The cause is, of course, the ruler, who by spiritual advice acts upon the principle that iron-handed tyranny is necessary to curb his unruly subjects, and to spare him the painful necessity of inflicting upon them death or the 'middle-passage'—the Hamitic form of transportation. More to make them feel his power than to ameliorate their condition, he will not allow them to cultivate around Whydah coffee and sugar-cane, rice and tobacco, which at times have been found to succeed. Similarly King Gezo stringently prohibited the growth of ground-nuts, except for purely domestic purposes. A caboceer may not alter his house, wear European shoes,¹ employ a spittoon-holder, carry an umbrella without leave, spread over his bed a counterpane, which comfort is confined to princes, mount a hammock, or use a chair in his own home; and if he sits at meat with a white, he must not touch knife or fork.² Only a 'man of puncto' may whitewash the interior of his house at Agbome,

¹ (Note by Burton): The only shoes permitted are the kind of leather bags called *Imálen fo-kpá*, or Moslem slippers, and these cannot be assumed without royal permission.

² (Note by Burton): Formerly caboceers were not allowed to drink out of a glass in the royal presence; now the King will even offer it.

and the vulgar must refrain from this, as well as from the sister-luxury of plank or board doors. And so in everything."¹

Much of this interference with private affairs resulted from the financial needs of the monarch and his court. Just as all officials held their position at the pleasure of the King, so they looked to him for compensation. This usually took the form of gifts, for stated salaries were unknown; but these gifts constituted only a minor portion of his expenditures.² His personal entourage had to be supported; his army had to be fed; and, most important of all, he must be able to purchase from European traders not only arms and ammunition, but cloths and rum to be used in the ancestral ceremonies. The revenues which permitted this came from two sources, trade and taxation. Trade with the outside world, as carried on until the early part of the nineteenth century, was principally that of slaving, though in addition palm-kernels and the oil made from them, ivory, and a few other commodities were also exported, their importance growing greater with the decline of the slave-trade. Other commerce which, while important to Dahomey, seems to have been unknown to the visitors to the kingdom during the period of its autonomy, was carried on with neighboring kingdoms. According to native informants, agricultural products, salt, and other commodities were traded both to the east and west, even though the peoples living there were enemies during the time of the annual wars. Duncan mentions the fact that the Mohammedan peoples living north of Dahomey complained to him of the high prices they had to pay for European and other trade articles because these had first to pass through Dahomey, where a heavy toll was levied.

¹ Vol. i, pp. 119-120. The degree of restriction which Burton claims was exercised over private ownership of property is undoubtedly an exaggeration, as preceding chapters have demonstrated that a great deal of property was privately owned by the rank and file of Dahomeans. This opinion, however, may be regarded as deriving from the nature of Burton's mission, which afforded him relatively few opportunities to observe the more humble aspects of Dahomean life. In spite of this objection, however, the picture he draws of other restrictions imposed on Dahomeans by their government is, on the whole, far from invalid.

² At the same time the King, in all probability, exacted greater tribute from his chiefs than he gave them in gifts. Skertchly, in his description of the Customs of 1871, heads a section "The Payment of the Tribute," where, commenting on the cauries presented to the King by his high officials, he says (p. 418): "It must be understood that the heap of cowries exhibited in public is only a *pro forma* tribute, the actual payment being made to the Benazon, and amounts to a considerable sum on the part of the ministers, who nevertheless go down on all fours and smother themselves with swish when offered a single string by the sovereign."

In the main, contemporary writers tell only of the revenues which accrued from trade with Europeans. That the pattern of exacting customs duties from importers was well established even before the time when the Aladaxonu dynasty extended its rule to the sea-coast is to be seen from Bosman's account of the duties imposed by the King of Whydah:

"This King's Revenue, in proportion to his Country, is very large; of which, I believe, he hath above One Thousand Collectors, who disperse themselves throughout the whole Land, in all Market-Roads and Passages, in order to gather the King's Toll, which amounts to an incredible Sum; for there is nothing so mean in the whole Kingdom, that the King hath not Toll for it; which, indeed, if all honestly paid to him, would make him very rich; but the Gentlemen Collectors so largely fleece it, that the King scarce receives one fourth Part of the whole.

"There are three principal Collectors appointed over the Slave-Trade; each of which is to receive a Rixdollar for the King's Toll, for every Slave that is traded for: But these Gentlemen, like the rest, agree underhand with those who sell the Slaves; so that the King receives nothing of it: But with respect to the Slaves which are sold for Boesies (the Money of this Country) somewhat better Care is taken, for the Sum contracted for is paid in the King's Presence, out of which he receives three Rixdollars for every Slave. Notwithstanding which Care, tho' he is the least cheated, yet some of his Subjects are so sly as to fetch their Money for their Slaves by Night, or at unseasonable Times, and consequently cheat him; and on account that we have continual occasion to make use of them, we cannot deny them their Money whenever they demand it.

"The exact half of all the Fines and Tolls in his Viceroyalties accrues to him; but I believe he would be very well satisfy'd if he could but get one Fourth."¹

Snelgrave and Dalzel confirm the statements made by natives at the present time that the principal reason why Agadja was eager to conquer his way to the sea-coast was that with Whydah between him and his source of European supplies, on the one hand, and his market for slaves, on the other, the transportation of goods through the kingdoms of Whydah and Ardra took from him a large proportion of his profits from slaving, and greatly increased the price of European goods which he received in exchange for the proceeds from slaves.

A century after Bosman the Dahomeans, firmly intrenched in Whydah, were collecting their own levies, and M'Leod tells the basis on which harbor dues, as they may be called, were imposed;

¹ pp. 336-337. See also Barbot, p. 335.

"The duty to the king for permission to trade in this country, was on a ship of three masts, twenty-one slaves; that is to say, the amount in goods of twenty-one slaves, according to the existing prices at that time:—for a brig, or schooner, fourteen; and seven for a cutter or sloop; being, in short, seven for each mast."¹

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Duncan takes occasion to comment on the high export taxes:

"All goods sent out of the country pay a very heavy duty, such as palm-oil or ivory; in fact, the native duty here on ivory is so great, that very little is now bought. It is always levied on the sellers, who, of course, are subjects of the King of Dahomey. Any hesitation in paying would cost the individual his head. . . . The duty on slaves is very high, and is charged upon the number shipped on board, which is upon the declaration of the Avoga, which is always made by his own head. When more than one party ships slaves, one of the party pays the Avoga generally in rum or tobacco, and then settles with the others, according to the number shipped by each party."²

Trade within the interior was also burdened with tolls, as will be seen when the regulation of those engaged in carrying burdens is discussed.

The essence of the system of internal taxation was based on the "control" exercised by the King through the women of his household.³ This function of the King's wives must be presented here in some detail, for it is impossible to comprehend the fiscal system of Dahomey without an understanding of the position of these women. Each ranking functionary in the kingdom was "controlled" by a woman in

¹ p. 10. ² Vol. i, pp. 122–123.

³ One of the few statements of any length concerning the internal revenue of the King is that of Duncan, (vol. i, pp. 122–123), who says: "All persons who possess any regular income are taxed accordingly. Some idea may be formed of the enormous revenue exacted by the King, when even one of M. De Souza's slaves pays annually a tax of head-money alone to the amount of two thousand five hundred dollars, and another one thousand five hundred; these two sums are head-money alone, which is always paid according to rank, reputation, and income, independently of duties paid for trade in articles either exposed for sale, or passed from one part of the kingdom to another, or to any other country not under the control of the King of Dahomey All head-money is paid in cowries. Every native of Dahomey is a slave, and pays a duty of so much head-money to the King, consequently many are very glad to leave their country, preferring a foreign bondage where less severity is exercised."

A summary by Forbes (vol. i, pp. 35–36), may also be quoted: "Taxes are heavy to all parties, and farmed to collectors. The holders of the Customs have collectors stationed at all markets, who receive cowries in number according to the value of the goods carried for sale. Besides these, there are collectors on all public roads leading from one district to another, and on the lagoon on each side of Whydah; in short, everything is taxed, and the tax goes to the King."

Foá, (p. 274), analyses the taxes levied by the King into five classes.

the palace, and all these women formed a group, called *nayé*.¹ For example, it may be supposed that one of these *nayé* who was entrusted with remembering the previous reports of the Yovogá² who, being in command of the sea districts, controlled all the makers of salt. The particular *nayé* to whom the Yovogá reported would be spoken of as the *yovogáno*, the "mother of the Yovogá," and she was always present whenever the question of the production of salt was brought up at court councils. She already had in her possession the report of the independent officers sent by the King to survey the salt industry, and it was her task to see that the Yovogá's statement of operations corresponded to this other when he made his accounting. The *nayé* were differentiated from the *kpósi*—the "wives of the leopard"—who were the King's companions when he gave audience to any of his counsellors. The *kpósi*, for example, were never permitted to speak to a man except through an intermediary; on the other hand, the *nayé*, being workers in the royal bureaucracy, were compelled, because of the nature of their duties, to hold conversation with men other than the King. It was the stated policy of the King to listen to none of his officials unless he first called for the *nayé* who was the "mother" of this chief. However, the *nayé* themselves were controlled by the *kpósi*, eight of whom, always with the King, were present to hear what was said by all who came to give account of their work, and the testimony of these women was final when a statement was in dispute. When the King was at Djémê, where his work was carried on, not only were these *kpósi* present, but there were eight others who listened to what the various chiefs had to say; and eight more whose duty it was to be present and overhear all that was reported by the priests. Thus there were three sets of witnesses to the truth or falsity of any statement made by a given official: his "mother,"³ the eight *kpósi* who were always with the King, and finally the second group of eight *kpósi* who were present when ministers or priests reported.

It was this series of checks that made it possible for the King to exercise what may be called "internal control" over the officials who, as his deputies, collected his revenues. There was, in addition, what may be termed "external control." The techniques of this external

¹ Cf. Burton (vol. i, p. 243), for mention of some of these female counterparts of male officials.

² See below, vol. ii, pp. 26-29.

³ Every traveller to Abomey had his "mother"; thus, the "English mother" figures prominently in the accounts of both Burton and Skertchly, and is always mentioned as being present when a private audience with the King was had by either of these two men.

control, which varied with each commodity or group of commodities taxed, may now be considered.

As has been stated, the basic industry of Dahomey is agriculture, and this, during pre-conquest times as at present, was largely in the hands of the great farmers known as *gletannu*. The chief of the *gletannu* was called *xení*, his second in command, *adjákà*. The chief duties of the *xení* and his assistant were to see that there was a balanced production of crops. To this end he needed information as to what was planted and where, so that if too much millet was produced in a given year and not enough maize, he could order a part of the land planted with the first cereal diverted to a maize crop. Ultimate control of agriculture for all Dahomey was in the hands of the *tokpó*, the "minister of agriculture." When there was an over-production of one crop and an under-production of another, the crop of an entire district might be changed at his command. At times, however, special reasons dictated the increase or diminution of certain commodities, as will be seen from the extent of regulation of the growing of pepper. That this procedure as reported by present-day Dahomeans was actually resorted to is shown by a contemporary example given by Duncan, who tells how the growing of shea-butter trees was suppressed and how, later, a certain controlled production was permitted:

"At twenty-three miles (north of Abomey) we crossed a small stream, called Azowah, running from east to west, the bed consisting of blocks of granite of irregular form and size. The trees here were stunted and scrubby, owing to the annual burning of the grass, which is done partly with a view of consuming the decayed vegetable matter, and partly to destroy the vegetative powers of the shea butter-tree. The destruction of this tree is a suggestion of the Spanish and Portuguese slave-dealers, the shea butter having formerly been a considerable article of trade amongst the natives, and it was feared would become one of European trade, and tend to attract the attention of the natives to its manufacture to the injury of the slave-trade. The slave-dealers of Whydah consequently made interest with the King of Dahomey to impose a heavy duty upon the shea butter exposed in the markets for sale. Still the demand of the natives was so great for this article, that even the duty imposed did not discourage them from the manufacture of it, till this duty was doubled. This imposition being too heavy, caused the poor natives to establish a system of smuggling, and, with a view to abolish smuggling, strict orders were issued to burn every tree in the kingdom of Dahomey, as well as those of the Mahee country subject to the King of Dahomey. Still, with all the burning, vegetation is so rapid and powerful, that much of the above article is still produced. In consequence of the manufacture being



a) A member of the royal family, distantly related to the last King.



b) Dahomean chiefs, grandsons of King Glele.



a) The late brother of King Behanzin, head of the royal family at the time of his death.



b) The present chief of the royal sib and his favorite wives.

declared illegal, numerous petitions were presented to his Majesty, or rather verbally conveyed to him, declaring the medical properties of the shea butter, and its beneficial use as an ointment, as well as a stomachic tonic; and his Majesty, with his exemplary goodness of heart, notwithstanding the solicitations of the most influential slave-dealers, declared the manufacture of a certain quantity (sufficient for the above-named purpose) to be lawful throughout the whole of his dominions."¹

According to information obtainable today, the distribution of the principal crops in the kingdom was as follows: In the vicinity of Tèndji, not far from Abomey, millet alone was cultivated; at Sinvé, maize was grown; while at Umbégame only yams were produced. In the whole region from Allada south to Whydah, maize and manioc were the principal crops,² and this pattern has persisted to the present time in this region, where one sees much more maize in the fields than in the more northerly portions of the territory once ruled by Dahomean kings. At Zadu beans were grown, at Save,³ peanuts (ground-nuts) and maize, at Dona yams and millet, at Laxe maize and manioc. At Dome, in the north, crops of beans were principally grown,⁴ between Zadu and Zagnanado, maize was cultivated, while returning to the immediate vicinity of Abomey itself, beans and maize were the principal crops. In Adjà maize was the staple; on the other side of the kingdom, near Zagnanado, millet was principally grown.

Every village had its *glegé*—farm chief—who supervised the agricultural activities of that village. When the King was ready to begin the annual customs in honor of his royal ancestors, each village-chief presented himself with the most important men of his village. Since it was required that the men of all the villages of the kingdom make a contribution to the King for the royal ancestral customs, the leader of each category of workers in the village presented himself with the chief of his village.⁵ This occurred always at the close of the harvest

¹ Vol. i, pp. 285–286.

² Cf. Skertchly, (p. 76), "... around Savi [near Whydah] it was too dark to make any accurate observations, but I could see that the staple crops were maize and cassava . . .," (p. 82) "Azoweh [south of Allada] is surrounded with plantations of yams and maize," and (p. 83) "... we emerged upon the maize-fields and cassava plantations of Alladah..."

³ Save, in the territory of the Maxi, is not to be confused with Savi, a town situated a short distance north of Whydah.

⁴ Cf. Skertchly, (p. 208) "A large market is held here [i. e., at a village just north of the plateau of Abomey] . . . and a great portion of the vegetables sold in Abomey are raised in the neighbourhood."

⁵ Though the count might be made of individual workers in the several callings, it was a basic principle of Dahomean taxation that assessments must be levied from groups. Thus, the unit was always the village for agriculture, the forge for iron products, the kiln for pottery, and the like, all the members of a group being held responsible for the levy made against the group as a unit.

period.¹ The King as he received them stood on a platform.² With him, among others, were the *nayé* concerned with agricultural products, and the *kpósi* who checked the findings of the *nayé*. As each village-chief arrived with the representatives of the various classes of workers of his village, pebbles were put aside for the number in each of these groups. The weavers came first, while the cultivators, under their *glegé*, were last. The difference between the total number of the pebbles put aside for the various classes of workers, and those for the village as a whole, as determined from the general census,³ gave the number of cultivators in the village. After the names of those who had given gifts to the King had all been called, the pebbles which represented the number of cultivators in each village were sent to the "minister" who controlled agriculture with a message that these stones represented the number of farmers in that particular village. Thus when the ceremony of giving gifts to the King for the ancestral rites was ended, the King, unknown to the chiefs of the villages, had in hand the number of farmers in that village.

The *tokpó* then proceeded to gather data. He, or his representative, visited every village to check on the harvest of that year. In pre-conquest days, the count was not made by sacks of produce, but rather by the number of granaries in which the crop was stored. The *tokpó* with his several assistants went about from field to field, counting the number of granaries which contained maize, or millet, or peanuts, or beans, or yams, each category being counted separately. Already having pebbles in his possession corresponding to the number of cultivators in that village, he was able to guard against any attempt to conceal produce. The *tokpó* at the same time also counted the number of palm-trees in the various groves of the village. When he came to a village in his official capacity as an officer of the King, the village-chief had the duty of caring for him; he was given a house in which to stay, he and his assistants were fed, and a young woman or two of the village who pleased him was placed at his disposal. The village-chief, however, did not take the cost of their entertainment from his own

¹ At the present time, the beginning of the annual customs has been timed to coincide with the French fête of Bastille Day, which, since it is celebrated on July 14, roughly coincides with the end of the great rainy season, when the harvests have been completed.

² This platform has often been described by those who viewed the annual "Attoh" customs, and was presumably the one from which goods and slaves were thrown to the multitude gathered below.

³ See vol. ii, pp. 72ff.

resources, but passed on the expense to the villagers, who were liberally assessed to meet such disbursements.

A month after the ceremonies preceding the annual customs, the *tokpó* was ready to report the total number of granaries in the region of Abomey to the King. Reports from the outlying districts were brought by the chiefs in charge of them, who had obtained the information from their own deputies. With these numbers in hand, the King was ready to fix the tax. When this had been decided upon, each village was forthwith informed how much of its produce was to be sent to the capital as its share of the total assessment. This tax, paid in kind, was supervised within the palace by a woman official, the *tshwenayó* (literally, "river-house-go-good"), whose title was derived from the saying of one of the early Kings, "If the river contains much fish, the great crocodile will have sufficient to satisfy his hunger, and the river will be tranquil" or, to quote the Dahomean restatement of this, if the King receives his due—is "fed"—Dahomey will not fail to prosper. The King's fields, it is said, were no more exempt from taxation than those of any other Dahomean, though this is open to question except insofar as it was a gesture dictated by policy. The foodstuffs gathered by means of this tax were used to provision the army during its campaigns.

The method of obtaining this impost throws light on two facets of the native logic underlying the framing of a successful program of taxation. The first is that of the control exercised by the monarch—that is, the "external" control—by indirect means. No one was questioned concerning the number of cultivators in a given village, but the count was quietly obtained while these men brought their gifts to the King as a prelude to the annual customs. The second is that when the King paid a tax from his own fields in the same proportion as that paid by every Dahomean, he succeeded in creating in the minds of his subjects an impression of impartiality, and thus gained a reputation for fairness which, from all accounts, he did his utmost to foster.

At the time the King fixed the proportion of the harvest to be brought to his palace, he also questioned the *tokpó* regarding the number of jars of palm-oil each palm-grove might be expected to yield. This yield is well known for the various regions of Dahomey and is about the same from year to year. If new trees had been planted, these were added by the *tokpó* to his count of the preceding year, and the number of jars of oil to be exacted from the total yield of palm-kernels from

these trees computed. If one grove had a capacity of ten jars yearly, then a tax of three jars was imposed; if nine jars was the yield, the King also took three. If a given grove produced only eight jars, the King would take two and one-half; apparently, the tax on palm-oil was approximately one-third of the total yield. The groves belonging to the King and the princes were levied upon as were their fields. The tax on palm-oil, known as *kuzũ*, was, according to present day Dahomeans who were speaking of conditions immediately antedating the fall of the kingdom, the most important tax in Dahomey after the slave-trade had been put down, and it was this tax which was invariably compared to the present taxes exacted by the French colonial officials. The oil which was levied was sent to Whydah and sold to the European traders, for the sum derived from palm-oil was relied upon primarily to "bring back guns and powder to Dahomey."

The manner in which livestock was taxed may next be considered. Cattle, pigs, goats, sheep and horses were counted, but not chickens, since these fowl, according to informants, cannot be counted—"If you count chickens today, tomorrow there will be more." During January, February, and March, the months of the campaigns and the great hunt, the animals mentioned above were allowed to run free. When the rainy season began, that is, when the growing crops might be damaged by these animals, it was ordered that they be confined. It was an offence punishable by an imprisonment of three months or more to allow an animal to be free during this time, a law which is still enforced. In the short dry season before the second crops were planted the animals were again allowed to graze freely, but in the succeeding months, when crops were once more growing, all the animals were again required to be carefully confined. Any animal that strayed and entered the field of another might be killed by the owner of the field, who needed to give only a hind-quarter to the owner of the animal.¹

The actual count began in October, the pigs being first enumerated so that the number of slaughterers of pigs might be determined. The King summoned three men who were hereditary chiefs of the butchers, named Aísû, Adjini and Gbédjê. These three, who were the vendors of pork in Abomey, were members of the same sib.² They were asked to give the names of the villages in which they bought their pigs,

¹ The aside to this was, "Dahomeans are often hungry for meat, and so it sometimes happens that a rope by which an animal is tethered is cut to cause it to stray."

² See below, pp. 184-186.

whereupon the King sent a message to the chiefs of these villages ordering them to bring all who had sold pigs to the butchers or who had pigs for sale to come to the palace, as a new price was to be established for their animals. As the men came, a pebble was set aside for each, this being done in the actual presence of the King himself. The *tonukwe* of each village stood at the side of the King as it reported, for the *tonukwe* had already quietly counted the number of animals in his village, noted to whom they belonged, and therefore was in a position to indicate when anyone falsified his return. In this manner an initial count was obtained, which was confided to the *nyé* concerned. This count, it must be noted, was so taken that the total number in hand was divided into the number of males and females of each species. An order was promulgated that no sows were to be slaughtered, since through them the stock of pigs is reproduced and maintained, and with this those who had come before the King were instructed to return to their villages, and told that a check on their statements would be made in six months. As they left the palace, an order was sent out to all the officials in charge of the toll-posts throughout the kingdom to permit no pigs to pass their controls.

Without making it known to the public, a supplementary order was next given to every *azomadágwè*—the official who was in charge of each market—to bring to the palace all the heads of pigs sold in his market during the succeeding six months. These heads were retained by the *Meú*, who was the chief over all the *azomadágwè*. When this period was at an end, the “control” was achieved by instructing all the *tonukwe* to report the number of male pigs in their villages. According to informants, the King, having “confidence” that the number of females had not been diminished, held it was not necessary to count these. As the toll-posts had been closed to the passage of these animals, and since the Dahomeans, who have always been very fond of pork, had become “desperate because the supply had been cut off,” the required information was immediately forthcoming. The number of pigs, plus the number of heads which had been delivered to the palace from the market-palaces, thus constituted the control, since the sum was required to be at least as great as that of the number given six months before. If any difference was noted, nothing was said at the time, for “the King’s patience is long.” If too many of the animals had been sold, however, the sale of pork was ordered suspended for a year. Thus, by this method, two ends were achieved; the number of pigs was known with a sufficient degree of accuracy, and the supply

of these animals was assured. The tax was imposed on the basis of these figures. Those who slaughtered the animals were assessed according to the number they had handled, a quarter being sent in addition from each market as a gift before the annual celebration of the royal ancestral rites; while a basic annual toll of one animal was levied on everyone who raised pigs.

The count of other livestock—cattle, goats, and sheep—was made in a different fashion. On the day of one of the great markets, a crier was sent to inform the people that the *yálànq*, the chief-priest of the river *Yálàn*, a stream which runs near Kana and is inhabited by a feared and powerful spirit, had issued notice that the god of the river had spoken, saying the harvest would not be good, and that an epidemic among the livestock was imminent. Every man or woman was therefore instructed to come to the palace in three days—that is, in two days—and to bring a caury-shell for each of his animals as a ceremonial offering; one for each goat, one for each head of cattle, one for each sheep, keeping separate those for the various kinds of animals. Before bringing the cauries, however, each animal was to be struck with the caury representing it, to take away the danger that threatened it. Faced with the possibility of the death of their livestock, all made haste to fulfil the injunction. Important here for the purpose of the ruler was the assurance that no one would attempt to bring a smaller number of cauries than the number of animals he owned, and that the count would be correct. The total number of cauries when assembled made an impressive sum, and since it was to be given as an offering from the entire kingdom, the King added a large amount of palm-oil before the total was sent to the *yálànq*. The people, of course, were greatly impressed with the amount the King added to their individually minute contributions and, when the predicted epidemic did not occur, all credit was given him for the prompt and generous action which, it was believed, had saved their livestock.

The real purpose of this ruse—the counting of these animals for tax record—must not be forgotten, however. It was remarked that each contributor was instructed to keep separate the cauries for his cattle, for his sheep and for his goats. Inside the palace, between the time when these cauries were given and when they were sent to the *yálànq*, one of the *nayé* counted them, putting aside a pebble for each caury, and depositing each of the three piles of counters in a separate sack. On that which represented the number of cattle a horn was sewn; that which represented the number of goats was decorated with

the representation of a beard; while on the sack which contained the pebbles telling the number of sheep, weeds and a tongue were appliquéd. If, in addition, this method was employed to obtain an enumeration of pigs—for these were sometimes also included as an additional control, and to further conceal the real purpose of the alarm—the representation of a butcher's knife was sewn on the sack which held the count of these animals.

That it was not possible to utilize such a ruse on every occasion was recognised, and care was taken that the pretext was varied from one time to the next. Thus, at another time, the priest of the Yálân river might send out an alarm that his god had warned him a great flood was coming, and in it many animals would be drowned. Perhaps a week before the alarm was given, a number of goats were strangled and their bodies left where they might easily be found. The next night the same thing was repeated, but this time sheep were killed; the next several cattle were done away with. By this time, naturally, rumors to account for the mysterious killing of these animals were flying, and when the crier announced the impending flood, everyone was prepared to act at once to put off the disaster. Or again, at another time, when misfortune befell someone and he consulted his diviner to ascertain the reason, he was told that, according to the word of Destiny, one of the Earth deities was killing his animals because he had had nothing to "eat" for a long time. The inquirer was informed that this deity had ordered palm-fronds to be placed about the necks of all livestock, and that a caury must be given him for every animal owned in the kingdom, so that suitable offerings could be purchased for him. The use of these palm-fronds was felt to be serious indeed, and everyone hastened to comply by depositing the requisite number of cauries at the proper shrine to the Earth god, for it was said that the King, being a rival to the "King of the Earth," washed his hands of the entire affair. Nevertheless, the *tavi* and the *kpogri*, two chiefs who supervised the priestly cults were present, and when the cauries had been brought, a pebble was set aside for each caury, these soon finding their way into the hands of the official within the royal compound who was entrusted with keeping count of livestock.

With the count in hand, the collection of taxes was relatively a simple matter. Animals were taxed only about every three years, and the size of the tax which was levied varied from period to period. Since the offerings of cauries were given by villages, the number of each kind of animal for each village was known, as well as the total

number for the kingdom as a whole. If, for example, a village had eight hundred goats, one hundred would be appropriated by the monarch as his due.¹ The same procedure would be followed in Whydah, in Adjâ, in Zagnanado and among the Maxi as has been described for "Dahomey"—that is, for the region of Abomey—only in these cases the animals would be counted and the tax levied by the proper chiefs commanding these districts.

To tax horses was not difficult and entailed no such subterfuges, for only important men might have or ride horses. Since the King limited the number of saddles in the kingdom, and, in addition, had promulgated an order that horses might only be kept in specified stables, no notice to the owners was necessary when the time came to make the count of these animals. A levy of four thousand cauries a year was made for each horse.²

The manner of taxing the kill of the hunters may next be considered. Here, as in the case of those who followed other callings, taxation was preceded by enumeration, and, as always, the technique employed was one of indirection. The office of chief of the hunt, the *degq*, existed in every village,³ so that the figures on hunting were collected according to the following and achievements of the individual *degq*.

Those controlled by a given *degq* were called *deklqgbwě*, and were termed "apprentices" by French-speaking Dahomeans. The duties of the *degq* to teach the young men of his village how the great animals—the elephant, the buffalo, the hyena—are to be killed, to give hunters their orders to proceed on a hunt, and to receive their accounts

¹ The manner of counting when this information was given is worth noting, the calculation being made that of eight hundred goats, five would be taken from each forty, this giving a total of one hundred.

² Another method of taxing horses, or, perhaps a supplementary tribute levied during the So-sin customs on those permitted to ride horses, is indicated by Skertchly (p. 197):

"The Sogan, or Master of the Horse, dressed in a showy striped tunic, and sitting side-saddle on a brown nag, shaded by a white umbrella with pink horses on the lappets, and preceded by a band, then paraded round the square, followed by his private retinue. After the third round he dismounted opposite the king, and kneeling down, bowed his head in the dust, and threw several handfuls over his head. Then rising on all fours he spoke as follows: 'Great king, we all see you once more performing the wishes of your fathers. They will rejoice to see you so doing. I now go to catch the horses of the caboceers, that they may not depart until you give permission.' Another dirt-bath followed, and the Amazons cried out, 'N'yoh,' 'it is good.'

"The followers of the Sogan then marched round the line of caboceers, and collected their horses, which were tied up in the Uhunglo market, and not returned to their owners until released by a fine of cowries."

³ See above, pp. 41 ff.

of what occurred during the hunt, have been described. However, it was not necessary for a hunter to hunt under the direction of the *degq* of his own village, since a chief of the hunt who had become famous attracted "apprentices" from other villages. Therefore, while it was true that each village had its *degq*, it can be seen why the count was best made by *degq* rather than villages. Before the conquest hunting was a recognized profession, and while amateur hunters might hunt on occasion and, when doing so, were responsible to their *degq*, yet the professionals constituted a definite category of workers. A warrior, for example, was not asked to go to the hunt, while, as a rule, cultivators did not hunt either. These professional hunters, furthermore, made up the military reserve, who guarded the capital while the army was away in active service.

Two hunting chiefs were stationed at the court, who, like all chiefs, were responsible to female counterparts inside the palace. They were known as *ag̃ch̃d̃* and *toṽi*, and were required to know not only the number but also the identity of the *degq*, both of the region of Abomey and in the more outlying provinces of the kingdom. The *ag̃ch̃d̃* had charge of the hunters, while the *toṽi* controlled the fishermen. In the coastal regions the contributions were in fish rather than the meat of wild animals, while those folk who lived along the rivers were taxed in dried fish.

The actual count was made at Djègbè, near Abomey, where, at a place named Gbwetisá, the shrine to a spirit of the hunt, called Gbwètí, was located. When the King had returned from his annual campaign, dressed in his military costume, he received the *degq* of the realm. In his right hand he held the head of the conquered "king,"¹ in his left, the sword that had been given to him during the ceremony of his elevation to the throne. The assembled *degq* were ordered to return to Djègbè after three days and bring with them the hunters under them. At the appointed time, each *degq* was lined up with all his followers. The King appeared before them, accompanied by his retinue who carried many hunters' knives of the type called *adradékwè*. As each group, headed by its *degq*, came before the monarch, the leader and each of his followers was presented with one of these hunting knives, and this done, the King danced a dance known as *sógbwè* with the hunters. In this dance, the behavior of the warrior was pantomimed; guns were discharged while everyone cried out, praising Gú,

¹ As will be seen, there is reason to believe that this was not really the head of the king who had been conquered, but of some substitute.

the god of iron and hence of weapons, and praising the King. When the dance was ended, a human cranium was filled with water, and each person present drank from it, beginning with the most renowned *degq* and ending with the King himself. All the *adradékwè* were then gathered together in a single heap once more, and bullocks, goats and chickens which had been donated by the King were sacrificed, their blood being sprinkled over the knives. The King also furnished food and drink for all participating. That night, when the festival was concluded, the King sent for the *gǔnǒ*, the chief-priest of Gú who took up these knives and put them in the *guzýmè*, the forest sacred to Gú, situated at Ahwagá. When the knives were in the forest, this priest instructed his assistants to count them, the number giving the tally of the hunters of the kingdom.

Because certain *degq*, conversant with the real object of this process, might instruct their followers to conceal some of the knives, another "external" control was applied. In the palace a record was kept of the number of *adradékwè* which had been taken to the ceremony.¹ The number which was left after the knives were given each hunter was also known. The difference between the number left in the hands of the retainers of the King after the knives had been distributed, and the number originally taken to Gbetisá had, therefore, to equal the number of knives counted by the *gǔnǒ* in his forest. If these two figures did not tally, the *degq* were again summoned and informed that since the deity of the hunt had indicated that someone had retained his knife, all *degq* must submit to the ordeal so the culprit could be ferreted out. How the discrepancy was discovered was not made known to them, for the *degq* were not instructed in the procedure of counting the knives. Once threatened with trial by ordeal, confession followed.

The count completed, the matter of the assessment of the hunters was determined. The *degq* were divided into thirteen groups, four for each Dahomean month, and each of the thirteen was ordered to furnish meat for the palace during one month. Being professional hunters, these men not only went on the great annual hunts but hunted all the time, hence one-thirteenth of their annual efforts were devoted to the support of the King and his court. The heads of all the animals they killed were required to be sent to the palace; and

¹ Sixty-five hundred was the number given by one informant, but this at best would only be an approximation, since the Dahomean tendency to employ numbers lightly when generalizing makes it impossible to place reliance on such estimates, especially where large figures are involved.

since it is said "Before the house of a great hunter are found the heads of great animals," the heads of elephants, lions, buffaloes, and other great beasts were placed before the entrance of the King's palace to glorify him. The heads of the small animals went to Gbwetĩsá for the deity of the hunt. Thus the amount of game killed as well as the number of hunters were controlled, and these several checks insured the King the maximum revenue from the hunters.

It was important that the honey produced in the kingdom be at the disposal of the monarch, for all the honey gathered was used for the army. In the region of Abomey two districts, Dome and Badagba, were set the task of honey gathering, and each person charged with this was ordered to set out four jars in the forest to serve as hives for the bees. Two pots of the type called *twizé* (the size women use to carry water) were required to be delivered full of honey by each apiculturist. When these arrived at their destination, they were given to a woman *vidékalá*, a term translatable as "The child who holds his hand out receives good things." She counted the *twizé* by twos, and in this way determined how many contributors were represented. The control was exercised without the assistance of the two chiefs who ruled the districts from which the honey came. An official called *zámáizé* was sent direct to the two forests, where he counted all the pots which served as hives. For each set of four hives, a pebble was set aside by the *zámáizé*, and when the controller returned the number of pebbles he brought was compared with the number which represented the pairs of full pots. If the two figures did not tally, an investigation was made and the guilty were severely punished. This was not merely because something the army had need of had been withheld, but because the Dahomean aphorism, "He who robs your honey covets your sweetness," suggested by the deed, involves the identification of the figure of speech "sweetness" with "contentment," so that the guilty one was felt to have struck, symbolically, at the happiness of the King, and consequently of the kingdom.

Those who gathered honey in the region of Abomey were also charged with the cultivation of red and black pepper and ginger, the total crop of pepper, like the honey, being destined for the palace. Control over these workers was in the hands of a captive who had been but recently enslaved, and had, therefore, had no contact with the workers he surveyed. This was felt necessary, for the fields yielded richly and an overseer who was on a friendly footing with those who raised such valuable products as the much coveted condiments could

not be trusted. With the cultivators under constant surveillance, it was unnecessary to have any other control, for in this case honesty of supervision was insured by frequently changing the slave charged with this duty. The problem of providing pepper for the people at large was, however, of first importance. Highly seasoned dishes characterize Dahomean cooking, and strong condiments are a necessity for even the households of the poor. All those who had fields were therefore allowed to grow a limited amount of pepper plants, the quota being restricted, however, to that number that would yield only a full raffia-sack of pepper. The *tokpá*, upon whom devolved the task of seeing that no one farmer exceeded this amount exercised his control through the *tonukwe* and *hýmékpǫntó*, the latter an official who supervised the inheritance of all property in the kingdom.

Inasmuch as a raffia-sack of pepper was insufficient to supply the needs of an entire family, that is, of a man and the households of his plural wives, an additional quantity had to be obtained. The astuteness of the monarchy in prohibiting the free cultivation of pepper, and yet permitting each farmer a limited supply, is once more in evidence, for had all of this important commodity been reserved as a state monopoly, this would have created wide discontent. Whereas, by allowing the cultivation of a fraction of each farmer's needs, the monarchy profited richly from the revenues exacted at the toll-gates which regulated the passage of commodities within the kingdom and at the markets, where additional quantities were bought.¹ The growing of pepper for commercial purposes was restricted to some seven villages in the region of Allada, the harvest being sold in the other parts of Dahomey, principally Abomey. As the pepper was transported and passed through the toll-gates, the official in charge of each gate levied a charge of forty-six caury-shells against each sack. Of the pepper sent to the King, part of it was used by the cooks of the royal household, but the larger portion was crushed by female slaves and placed in small calabashes for distribution to the soldiers at the beginning of a campaign, to season the meat rationed them while at war.

Ginger, a luxury, was permitted to be grown only in two districts, and was distributed exclusively by the King's officials. It was reserved for medicinal uses and the private sale of it was severely punished. Brief mention may also be made here of the production of indigo, which, gathered from the wild plant, was apparently not taxed. The gathering was done by women who had passed the menopause, since

¹ See below, pp. 128ff.

Dahomean custom holds that when a man finds a woman gathering indigo, and he desires to have connection with her, she may not refuse him.

The most important condiment, in Dahomey as elsewhere in Africa, was salt. Salt was obtained by evaporating sea-water, and preparers of salt lived in the quarters of Whydah named Zombodjî and Djegbadjî. By order of the King, each salt-maker was required to dig a special earthen pan where the process of evaporation was carried on, and authority for the digging was only had from the proper deputy of the monarch. Tradition tells that the King declared he wished no revenue from salt, since salt is necessary to life. It was, therefore, ordered that every year only ten small sacks of salt need be sent to Abomey by every preparer for the use of the court. These ten sacks totaled about eight kilograms, a relatively small contribution when the size of the taxes exacted by the Kings of Dahomey on other products is taken into consideration. They were deposited with the Yovogá at Whydah, and were kept by him in a store-house there. For each sack received, a pebble was set aside, and at stated times the Yovogá would send these *djèkè* ("salt-pebbles") to Abomey. When they arrived they were counted in sets of ten, to find out the number of workers represented by them. In order to ascertain whether the Yovogá had diverted any of the salt due the palace, an official called *akwedenúdjè* was sent to Whydah. The title of this official, which, literally translated, signified "money-no-matter-price-salt" throws some light on the attitude the Dahomeans had towards salt, which as a necessity to life, must be sold to anyone who requested it, even if he could only buy one caury's worth. The *akwedenúdjè*, then, when he arrived at Whydah, counted the number of salt-pans in the two quarters where the salt-workers lived, and, having made his count, returned to Abomey and reported the tally. Being in ignorance of the number of pebbles representing the count of contributors of salt, it was difficult for his results to be manipulated, particularly since he was sent to Whydah without the knowledge of the Yovogá. If the totals did not tally—especially when the number of pebbles in the palace was less than the count of the *akwedenúdjè*—the matter was a serious one for the Yovogá, and present-day informants insisted that a difference even of one contribution would cause him to forfeit his income from office for that year.¹

¹ It must be kept in mind that the King's officers each had their own sources of revenue, for, beside what they exacted from those under them, they were allowed to retain a major portion of the fines they imposed, and were also permitted to levy fees from the workers of their districts.

The manner of assessing the iron-workers may next be considered. There were twelve forges where hoes might be made. In Abomey the Agbañlì, Tê, Akatì and Agbô forges were to be found; at Kana was the Djímahwê forge; at Umbégame was the Dokpê; at Dān was the Gblangblang; at Djídjá, the Zumáhwê; in the region of Adjá, the Kokwédadjí; at Allada, the Sogbwénù; and at Whydah, the Xopatì. Each forge was watched over by an official called the *felikpɔtɔ*, who saw to it that these forges made nothing but the hoes and the *asê* which they were also permitted to manufacture. The *felikpɔtɔ* had no control over the manner in which hoes were sold; he was present only to supervise their manufacture. However, no Dahomean might buy a hoe directly from the maker at the forge, for all hoes must be sold at the markets. It was in this way that the control was exercised.

Each forge had a device registered at the palace and stamped on its products. Copies of these marks were distributed among the chiefs of all Dahomean provinces and made known by them to every *axinô*, or market-head. Every sale of a hoe in any market was required to be made in the presence of the *axinô* or his representative, when the mark on the implement was noted. Each market-head was provided with twelve boxes, on each of which was placed the mark of one of the twelve forges, and when a hoe of a given mark was sold, a pebble was placed in the corresponding box. Once a box was full, it was sent to Abomey, and a new box was begun for the products of that forge.

When it was time for the count, the boxes were all called in, and the smiths were summoned to the palace. They were not told to stop their work, for it was said this would have made a bad impression; they were merely commanded to come before the King. The head of each forge was asked how many hoes he had made, so the King might know how many hoes were available to "wound the earth." Each answer was vouched for by the *felikpɔtɔ* who supervised a given forge, and was noted by the *nayé* who in the palace had charge of the affairs of the forgers. From the total of hoes manufactured, the number sold was deducted, leaving the quantity on hand.

The count made, each iron-worker was given a bar of iron by the King, and instructed to return after a given time with a specified number of cartridges. The number demanded of the forgers in any years was based on the supply of unsold hoes, and the more of them on hand, the more "cartridges" were levied. Thus the production of hoes was controlled, and, at the same time, the army was provided with

cartridges. The psychology underlying the gift of a bar of iron to each forger is not without interest, since, to the native, it was of the same order of "payment" as the trivial sum given the soldiers for their captives. For, inasmuch as the iron for these cartridges was to be instrumental in taking human lives, the King by this token purchase was once more "washing his hands" of any supernatural consequences which might bring evil on those who manufactured these instruments of death.

Production figures of the smithies which did not make hoes were gathered through the priests of Gũ, the god of iron. The King set a date on which Gũ should be "given food to eat" at all his shrines and for this ceremony many cocks were placed at the disposal of the chief-priests of Gũ. At the same time, all Gũ priests were notified that those who failed to participate in this rite by calling for their share of these fowls would be punished by the deity. The Dahomeans being devout, the priests invariably obeyed, and since every forge must have its shrine to Gũ, the deity especially sacred to forgers, all the shrines were represented. As usual, the ceremony for the outlying divisions of the kingdom was carried out in the respective centers of fiscal control. As each priest arrived, he was asked how many smiths worked at the forge which he represented. In this way the *ekpodesi*, whose task it was to count the smiths, obtained the requisite information concerning the total number of forges in the kingdom, since it was only necessary for the number of cocks taken to be subtracted from the total number which had been made available.

In similar fashion statistics for other crafts were gathered; the weavers were counted and levies were made against the product of their looms; the wood-cutters were known and assessed on the basis of the quantity of their product. Always, however, indirection was the technique employed, and the masking of the real purpose of questioning was apparently achieved.

Sales taxes were levied as well as imposts on the products of the workers. The market assessments were made by the *azomadágwê*, who had four groups of assistants, a separate group for the markets of each day of the Dahomean week. Taxes in kind took the form of small contributions exacted from every seller; thus, every market-woman was assessed a measure of corn meal, or millet, or of palm-oil, and so on through the list of all commodities for sale. Contemporary testimony to verify this is not lacking, as the following quotation indicates:

"The market [at Whydah] is superintended by a chief constable, who attends to its cleanliness and regularity.... Those who expose goods for sale... are subjected to a very heavy duty to the King of Dahomey, as well as those trading in any other place.... There are several other markets of minor importance in Whydah, all subject to the same scale of duties, which are collected by the Avogan's [i.e., Yovogá's] officer."¹

Even today, it is said, a representative from the palace gathers samplings of everything sold in the market, with the exception of cloths, a part of these contributions being taken to the restored palace of the kings, to provide for the old men and women who are custodians of the tombs of the ancient kings and the proceeds of the balance being held to cover unforeseen expenses of the royal family. In the days of the monarchy, the proceeds were used to help feed the court and certain types of the King's prisoners.² It is said, furthermore, that those who at the present time do not contribute in the traditional fashion to the purse of the royal family come to the palace during annual customs and give of their wares; it being pointed out that even non-Dahomean Negro store-keepers help support the annual customs.³

The tax collected on goods in transit, through a system of toll-gates placed along the highways of Dahomey, was one of the most lucrative in the fiscal system of the monarchy. The existence of these customs posts from the time of early European contact is verified by the records of travellers in the kingdom, most of whom comment on the system of *dénô*, as those who occupied the toll-posts were called. The following excerpts from Duncan, given in greater detail than elsewhere, describe these customs posts:

"At nineteen miles [north of Abomey] the path again changed to N.E., and at twenty miles we came upon the small kroom of Dtheno, through which the path runs.

"In this kroom is a custom-house for collecting the duties upon all goods carried through it, from whatever part they come. The heaviest duties are imposed upon tobacco and rum, which are brought from the coast in great quantities: these goods are chiefly of Brazilian and American manufacture. The rum is invariably of a very bad quality. A small duty is also imposed upon all regular traders, even on articles of native growth or manufacture. This is imposed upon the trader instead of license, and is considered more fair to the trader; for should

¹ Duncan, vol. i, pp. 120 and 122.

² This last statement is to be accepted with reservations, since contemporary writers were unanimous that Dahomean prisoners had to be fed by their own families if they were to survive their imprisonment.

³ Understandably, it was not possible to verify this statement.



a) The chief-priest of Dą at Whydah and three of his retainers.



b) The chief-priest in charge of the Xevioso temple at Xevié.

Plate 27



a) View outside a compound near Abomey.



b) Inside a compound of the village of Djidja.

he not sell his goods he has not the duty to pay; but, on the other hand, if he has a good trade, he can afford to pay the low rates of duty. These custom-house establishments are invariably the property of some one of the King of Dahomey's ministers, as well as all the duties collected at such establishments. They are established in all the most convenient parts of certain districts, by the same rule as our turnpike-gates in England, so that every person must pass through them. These customs are bestowed by the King as rewards of conquest upon his caboceers—each of his Majesty's cabinet ministers, or caboceers, having an army of his own; and when a war takes place, and the Dahomans prove victorious, the town taken is considered as belonging to the minister or caboceer whose soldiers capture the town; or rather, his right of monopolizing the trade of the town is established, so far as to supply it himself with all goods of British manufacture or produce, with the exception of such traders as have obtained permits as a proof of their having paid the duty. The trade is entrusted to the most confidential or head men belonging to the caboceer owning the trade. I found them invariably clever, intelligent, and generous people. The King also imposes upon each caboceer a slight duty, according to the amount of their trade...¹

"... At thirty-three miles we arrived at Setta Dean, so named after the family, or headman residing here as collector of the customs. This custom-house belongs to Mayho, the King of Dahomey's prime minister. Here is a fine quadrangular court-yard, three sides of which are formed by a close broad hedge of various shrubs, with an outer hedge of the prickly bush, the remaining side composed of different apartments or huts, for the accommodation of the officers of customs, and also for carriers of goods, who may be weary and unable to proceed farther till recovered from their fatigue. Here is also a guard of soldiers, who perform similar duties to our police-officers in England, and afford protection to all goods deposited in their charge."²

Under certain conditions, such as the crowing of cocks in the market-place, or on the highway, all the goods of a carrier who owned the offending cock were confiscated. Burton describes one of the toll-posts, and refers to this practice of confiscation:

"We halted at the De-nun, or octroi-house, ever the entrance and exit of Dahoman, and indeed, of all Yoruba towns. The place of profit was denoted by a Jo-susu, or wind-luck, which commonly appears at gates and entrances. It is a gallery of three thin poles, under which the road passes. From the horizontal limb depends a mat four feet square, painted with a St. Andrew's cross in red, in black, or in both mixed, and where the four arms meet a cock is crucified, like St. Peter, head downwards.... The unoffending 'bird that warned Peter of his fall,' appears in public always gagged by a thong passed

¹ Vol. i, pp. 282–283.

² Vol. i, p. 290. Cf. also vol. i, p. 258, and Skertohly, pp. 84–85.

between the mandibles and tied behind the head: a rooster may crow in the house, but if he give tongue on the highway or in the market-place, he is confiscated to the 'market-master,' or to the fetish man. I could find no reason for the custom, but 'we custom:' it is probably only an item of the whimsical perquisites which form part of the plundering system of all semi-barbarous hierarchical communities. The turnpike is universal throughout these lands. A rope is stretched by the collector across the road, and is not let down till all have paid their cowries. The octroi is not unreasonable, but most of the market folk being women, there is always a tremendous clatter. Fetish and taxpaying, I have said, go together."¹

Present-day accounts of how those who carried burdens—that is, the porters—were controlled and taxed, materially aid in rounding out the descriptions given by the travellers. On each road leading into Abomey, one of these *dé*, manned by two officials, was set up and one of the officers assessed the tax, while the other collected it. As an example of how the system of toll-posts was used to the utmost advantage the instance may be taken of an especially good harvest when orders were issued permitting the surplus to be sold outside the country, and the porters were thereupon permitted to carry export loads. The amount of tax levied on these products was made known to the officers at each post, such levies being established not only for cereals, but also for meat, oil, liquor, cloths and even captives, if they were transported from one part of the kingdom to another.

During the dry season, on the occasion of the annual feast given by the King, the public crier was sent to the markets to announce that all porters must declare themselves before a given official known as *akabasá*, and that in the event they failed to do this, they would not be allowed to pass any toll-post. As the men reported, each gave his name and, in secret, proffered some kind of sign to constitute his passport. Thus, one might employ a small chain, counting the links, so that there would be one for each toll-gate through which he must pass, the other links of the chain being distributed among the keepers of the gates. Another might give a small raffia-cloth into which a given number of large and small stripes had been woven, replicas of these cloths being also distributed to all officers at the toll-posts. When, for example, this porter, with his load of maize or oil or other merchandise arrived at a toll-post, he was asked for his "passport" and produced the cloth. This was then compared with the cloth that had already been received by the keeper and if there was even a minor

¹ Vol. i, pp. 93-94.

difference between the two, the carrier was bound and sent to prison. A small pebble was set aside at each toll-gate every time a given porter passed through it, and at the end of the year the amount he was assessed was based on the number of trips he had made. Between Whydah and Abomey there were four posts through which the traveller must pass, and impost was not only levied on the maize, oil, "country" cloths and other products taken to the coast, but also on the tobacco, European cloths, and other imported products which were transported into the interior.

In addition to levies assessed on producers, sellers, and carriers of goods, those who followed other occupations were also taxed. The grave-diggers may be taken as one example of how the monarchy exploited all possible sources of revenue. Tradition has it that Akaba decreed that the calling of the grave-digger must in every village be followed only by the descendants of one family. Hence in each settlement he chose a compound whose male members were set the task of digging all the graves of that village. In addition, he forbade his descendants to set aside any additional compounds above the number he had designated. When Akaba laid down his injunction not to increase the number of compounds for grave-diggers, Dahomey was small. "It seems strange," said one informant, "that, though Akaba predicted that Dahomey should become large and powerful, yet he set this arbitrary limit for the number of grave-diggers." The difficulty was met in characteristic fashion; as each new village was added to Dahomey, the King took a man and a woman from one of the grave-diggers' compounds already established, and ordered them to settle in the new village, thus spreading the available supply of grave-diggers.

Yearly the Mɛ̀ngá summoned the heads of compounds of grave-diggers, and was informed of the number of men over thirteen years of age who lived in each, thus obtaining the count of the total number of grave-diggers in the kingdom. As usual, the tally was kept with pebbles, which were placed in a raffia-sack on which the representation of a hoe had been appliqued.¹ These pebbles, called *yɔ̀kpokɛ̀* ("grave-

¹ This technique of identifying the numbers of individuals or objects in any given category, it may be remarked here, was generally employed. Thus, the representation of a gun was appliqued on the sack containing the pebbles representing the number of hunters; that of a carrying-basket on the sack which held the pebbles giving the number of porters. On the sack which told the number of cultivators, a corncob was sewn; on that of weavers, a small loom; on that of the number of palm-trees, a palm-tree; on that of the number of fishermen there was a net; on that of the iron-workers, the representation of an anvil was to be seen.

digger-pebbles“) were then deposited in the palace. The tax was assessed on the basis of the compensation received by the diggers. As will be observed when the funeral is discussed, chickens, a cloth, two francs fifty centimes—in the olden days ten strings of two thousand cauries each—and a bottle of liquor were appropriated by the Mɔ̀ngá. The Mɔ̀ngá returned the chicken and the cloth to the grave-digger as his pay, but kept the money to be used for the purchase of mortuary cloths for soldiers killed in war. The drink went to the Gaó, the war-chief.

The *dokpwégǎ* were also counted and taxed. This tax, however, was not paid by the *dokpwégǎ*, but by the families of those they buried. After a funeral was over, cloths, money and beverages were sent to the palace where they were kept by the *dokpwé gbúnúgǎ*, that is, the chief of all the *dokpwégǎ* of the kingdom. This official had no right to any of this wealth, but merely held it in trust. When the year came to an end, what he had received was divided into three parts. The first was given to the Meú to pay for the burial of princes and princesses. The second portion went to the *ataki*, an official who had charge of the burial of chiefs, to be used in the rites of their funerals. The third portion went to the *bínazǎ* for the burial of captives who had died a natural death, since these had no relatives in Dahomey to celebrate their funeral customs. Before this tripartite division was made, however, ten or twenty cloths were given to the *dokpwé gbúnúgǎ* for his trouble in collecting and caring for them. The total number of *dokpwégǎ* was checked as a control, but, since there might only be one for every village, and the total number of villages was known, this was not difficult. It was only necessary, therefore, to learn how many persons each *dokpwégǎ* had buried in a given period when it was desired to ascertain whether or not the amount turned over to the three officials by the *dokpwé gbúnúgǎ* was correct.

From these sources, then, the revenues of the Dahomean monarchy were largely derived. Nevertheless it was not revenue alone that was sought, but control as well; in other words, the problem of taxation was not only an economic one, but was also inextricably intertwined with socio-political aims. It was for this reason that, in each case, control was of the utmost importance, and why the indirect method of counting with a constant checking both outside and inside the palace was more than just a basis for taxation, but was of itself an essential end to efficient government. One more example of this control may be given for, even though it does not bear directly

on the production of revenue, it shows how in all phases of life, the monarchy was careful to retain ultimate power. This example concerns the manner in which the cult-houses, erected for the worship of what may be termed the "public" deities—the Great Gods—were held under the power of the King. It is obvious, that were this organized worship to get beyond governmental control, it would constitute a real danger in a despotism where even the remote possibility of revolt must never be overlooked. Consequently, it was ruled that no cult-house might be established unless the chief-priest had a rattle, which, in turn, could be obtained only from the palace. No notation was made within the palace at the time these rattles were distributed, nor any account taken of those to whom they were given. At the time of the annual customs it was announced to all the priests of the ancestral cult that a special ceremony was to be held on a given day, and on that day each must come and bring his *asogwè*—his rattle. If the priest was ill, he sent a member of his family with it—the important matter was to present the rattle at the ceremony. At other times during the year dates were proclaimed for the priests of other cults, on which their rattles must be brought. At the time set for the priests of the Thunder and Sea cults, all the *asogwè* of the Xevioso priests were produced; when the principal ceremony for the Earth gods was enacted near Abomey, all the Sagbatá *asogwè* were brought there; when the annual ceremony took place at Djená, a quarter of Abomey where the principal temple of the Sky cult is maintained, all rattles belonging to subsidiary cult-houses of that pantheon were in evidence. It is not to be thought that the requirement for every priest to have a rattle is other than a religious one, for an *asogwè* is indispensable for summoning the deities. The annual feast at the principal temple for each deity, indeed, is primarily to allow the rattles of a given group of priests to be consecrated anew.

What, then, of the control maintained over the cult-houses? This was the task of the *bínazǝ*. Each year a planter who bore the title *djidógbwè*, sent to the palace forty-one calabashes (*glo*) from which rattles are made. The *djidógbwè*, when he sent these calabashes, put aside a number of pebbles corresponding to the number of *glo* that had been annually delivered. The *bínazǝ*, after counting the rattles in use, returned the calabashes that were left after the year was over, and the total number of *asogwè* employed by the priests, plus the number returned, were required to equal the number of pebbles in the possession of the *djidógbwè*. While a rattle, if broken, might be

replaced by another without special authorisation, there was no lack of emphasis on the belief that if two rattles were employed in the same cult-house, the power of the deity would be "spoiled."

The question why such a careful count of cult-houses was kept when there was no economic advantage to be gained from this, naturally arises. That the King must know everything concerning his kingdom was one reason, as was the necessity of his knowing what provision to make when, on occasions of great moment, the priests joined in making sacrifices. But more important than this was the fact that control of the priests made for control of their cult-followers. In each cult-house, a small pouch called *kpataklô* was found, in which the chief-priest placed a pebble each time a novitiate finished the cult initiation ceremonies. The priest himself was never permitted to count the number; he turned away his head when he even so much as dropped one of these pebbles in it or when, after the death of a cult-follower, he removed a stone. The pouch remained always in the cult-house and the number of stones in it could be counted only by the chief-priest of each pantheon. Thus each of these priestly officers might know the number of cult-members under him—information which each of the high-priests was required to transmit to the King when a count of the number of followers of each cult was desired. However, since about half of all the inhabitants of the kingdom were numbered in the membership of the cult-groups, and the other half of the Dahomean people were related to cult-members, and since, also, the religious convictions of these cult-members and their relatives required implicit obedience to commands of the priests, control over the cult-houses by the King gave him a simple means of rapidly making known an edict to the people, and of assuring compliance with it.

Part III

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Chapter VIII

KINSHIP GROUPS IN DAHOMEAN SOCIETY

Dahomean society is made up of three types of social groupings. The primary one is the family (*hwé* or *hò*, "house"), comprising a man, his wife or wives, and their children. Next in size and importance is the extended family (*gbě*), composed of the families of a number of brothers and their sons. This social form is essentially based on contiguity of residence, for no extended family regards as a part of itself the immediate family of a brother or son or nephew who has migrated. Finally, and most extensive as well as of greatest importance are the patrilineal sibs (*xenú*), each of which is composed of many extended families, and includes a large number of individuals. These sibs are today not localized regionally, but their members are found over all Dahomey.

Before turning to the inner structure of Dahomean society, some consideration may be given to the arrangement of dwellings which house the social divisions. These are also three in number, comprising the house, the compound, and the collectivity. Of the three, the compound, where the primary family-group reside, is the most important unit, consisting of an aggregate of buildings surrounded by a wall. The collectivity, which houses an extended family, is composed of neighboring compounds, ranging from two to five, but rarely exceeding that number.

Essentially, the house itself may be conceived of as the habitation of a woman and her children. Except in the instance of certain ceremonial buildings a house always forms a part of a compound. Within the compound wall, however, are individual houses reserved for the husband and father of the family, for his brothers and adult sons who live with him, for the adolescent boys, for the worship of the ancestors, for the use of the compound head for consulting his Destiny—if he is a man of substantial means—and for storage purposes, besides those inhabited by each wife and her children. The typical Dahomean house is of very simple construction. It is most often

rectangular, has walls of pile, and a thatched roof. Usually the front wall of the house is set back somewhat so that under the overhanging eaves the woman who lives there has a place in the shade to do her household tasks or to converse with her friends. Her daughters live with her until they are married; her sons until they are old enough to join the boys in a communal group-house which they erect, though until their marriage they come to the houses of their mothers to eat.

The grouping of the compounds of an extended family gives the Dahomean landscape its distinctive character, for the color of walls and houses is that of the soil from which they are made, and this, with its definite reddish tinge, always affords colorful vistas through the green of the palm-groves. This organisation of dwellings into compounds makes for a lack of crowding, since compounds are separated one from the other by open ground which, as has been indicated, is cultivated in the proper season.¹

The only difference between house- and compound-walls is one of height, house-walls being from five to seven feet high, and compound-walls from eight to twelve feet. In pre-conquest days the size of a compound-wall was an indication of the rank of its owner. The most impressive walls are those enclosing the compounds of the kings which, covering each an area of many acres, even today tower twenty or thirty feet from a base that is ten to twelve feet wide. These walls, like the walls of houses, are built in horizontal layers, and each of these layers remains permanently discernible. At times a narrow gabled roof of thatch is constructed above the walls, but this is not essential, because of the extreme durability of the pile from which the walls are made.

The absence of crowding within the compound may be noted as a general characteristic of its structural composition. While occasionally several houses are grouped close together, in the main, the individual house stands some ten or twelve feet from its neighbors. The larger compounds are divided into a number of court-yards. In one of these court-yards the head of the compound has his dwelling place, in another, live his wives, while in a third the family altars are found. This arrangement into court-yards assures a privacy, which, in the compounds of chiefs, where each court is separated from the next by

¹ The only exceptions found to this were in the town of Allada and the city of Whydah. Even in those a single wall is never shared by two compounds, but there is always at least space for a pathway between the boundaries of the dwelling-complexes.

walls, and where the doors leading from one to another are always well guarded,¹ is made impressively effective.

The collectivity has no unifying wall, but itself consists of a number of compounds. In villages, an entire quarter is often occupied by related family groups who themselves comprise a collectivity, though in a city the size of Abomey, no collectivity would be large enough to constitute a quarter. One compound of the group of dwelling complexes is regarded as the principal one, and it is here that the ancestral shrines are located. The compounds of a collectivity are generally situated among the palm-groves and fields belonging to that collectivity and here, too, are those trees that are held in trust for the group who live there.

Transcending the importance of the physical setting in which a relationship group lives, however, are the attitudes that symbolize these relationships and mark the behavior of those who live in these complexes of dwellings. For an understanding of how the social groups are organized and the rôle they play, a double approach may be utilized; the first genetic, the second descriptive. That is, the manner in which these relationship groups are formed and how they develop may first be considered, after which the terminology of relationship which reflects them may be analyzed.

We may begin with the founding of a compound, and assume that a man, A, has separated himself from his family and gone off to found a new household. Let us also assume that A has two wives, each of whom has borne a son, so that there are two sons, B and C. At the death of A, his son, B, takes over the control of the property of his father and builds his father's tomb in the compound he had founded. We may assume, furthermore, that at the death of A, both B and C were mature men, and that each had built a house in the compound of his father. After their father's death, each adds to the number of his wives as his means permit and builds more dwellings to house them and their children, so that the compound becomes larger and larger in size.

In due course of time B, the elder brother, dies, whereupon his younger brother, C, takes over the headship of the compound founded by his father. However, the children of B do not continue to live in the compound established by their grandfather, A. C, who is now head of the relationship group, builds a new compound nearby, and

¹ The plan and explanation given by Le Herissé, pp. 358-360, make it unnecessary to go into more detail concerning the Dahomean dwelling house.

gives this compound to the eldest son of B, who may be designated D. D goes to live in the new compound with his own wives and children, and there he builds the tomb of B, his father. However, he is not permitted to take his father's property with him, as this has been inherited by C as trustee for the entire group. It must not be forgotten that when A lived in the original compound, he had planted palm-trees and had cleared fields, all of which still yield, and which were inherited first by B and then in turn by his younger brother, C. On the other hand when B was head of the compound, he also had planted trees and had cleared fields. These, in turn, have been set aside for the heritage of his own son, D, on the principle already stated in discussing inheritance, that the lands and trees of the founder of the compound are reserved for those who remain in the original compound where the remains of the founder are buried.

At the death of C, the founder's second son (or his third or fourth, if he has that many, which is to say, at the death of the youngest brother of the generation succeeding the founder), D, the eldest son of the elder son, returns to the grand-parental compound. Before he goes there, however, he names his next younger brother, who may be called E, as head of the second compound of the collectivity to succeed himself. He leaves all his own goods and whatever he has inherited from his father to E, and takes the property of A, the founder, in his new capacity as head of the original compound and trustee for the descendants of its founder. If his uncle, C, also had sons, he takes the eldest of these, who may be called F, builds him a separate compound—the third now of this collectivity—segregates the goods that have been actually earned or created by C, as well as F's own goods, and gives them to him to take with him to his new dwelling place. In this third compound the tomb of the second brother, C, father of F, is erected.

When the oldest male of the second generation (in this case D) returns to his grandfather's compound, he brings with him any property of his own that he has earned, and retains control of the fields and palm-groves he himself has planted. These are now worked by his own children for him and for themselves. The revenue accruing from the palm-groves and fields that were planted by A, the founder, must, however, be strictly accounted for to the entire relationship group, the proceeds being used for ancestral ceremonies, and reserves, maintained when possible, to draw upon in times of special stress when aid must be given family members. On D's death, he is buried in the second compound of the collectivity with his father, and to this place

his children return and build themselves houses. The oldest son of the second brother, F, now comes to the ancestral compound and takes over the headship of the group as a whole, giving his own goods to his brothers in the same manner as D had done. If F (or any family head after him) should have no brothers to whom he could confide whatever property he himself has earned, he turns these goods over to a sister—a special case which will be discussed presently. On F's death, he is buried in the third compound with his own father, and all his children now prepare to return to this compound which they left to take over the ancestral one. Thus the possibility is faced of leaving the compound of the founder uninhabited. The family, however, meet this problem by sending two sons from each of the other two compounds to live temporarily in the compound of A.

The procedure now changes, for the group has become large enough to be a full-fledged extended family. The members of the family gather to name their family-head, who whatever his qualifications or his limitations in ability or health, must be the oldest living male. He and his wives and his children go to live in the ancestral compound, replacing those who had been temporarily living there. This new head now holds in trust the ancestral palm-groves and fields and maintains control over his own personal goods as well.

The formal establishment of an extended family does not end its growth, however. At the time of the naming of the head of the extended family, there were two tombs each in the second and third compounds, founded respectively by B and C, sons of A. Now with the passage of time, these compounds are once more divided. Each of them now has two entrances, and the oldest son of the elder son of the founder of each takes the tomb of his grandfather and the portion of the compound that was his, while the next in line (according to the rules which governed the division of the original compound) takes over the remaining part of each, where his own father's tomb is found. This creates a total of five compounds, which comprise a collectivity and, in their inner aspects, an extended family, a *gbě*, though this term is not always used, since more often the group takes the name of its founder. If his name were Gbúsù, then they would be called *gbusùhwě* "Gbúsù's house," or if they increase they might be termed *gbusù salámě*, that is, the *gbusù* quarter. In the event there are no sons to take over the headship of a given compound, the chief of the ancestral home summons a diviner, and confides this compound to that descendant of the founder chosen by Destiny.

We may now return to the instance when, in a new compound, one who succeeds to his father's or grandfather's place has no brothers or sons to whom he may confide the property he himself has earned, so that this must be given to his sister. This woman, who, it may be assumed, is married and has children, thereupon leaves her husband's compound and comes to live in the house of her brother, watching over his property, doing what she can to preserve and increase it. Her husband comes to visit her from time to time and to advise her in her trust. On her death the family is assembled, and Fate is asked to name a man of the family who is to marry a daughter of the deceased.¹ The children of this marriage will belong to the same extended family as their maternal grandmother, and a son is named heir to the property confided to his grandmother, which thus comes back into the family.

It may be that the woman made a trustee for her brother's property had more than one daughter, or that her daughters were grown and married when this occurred. Since, however, the daughter who is to be a party to this marriage is chosen by the diviner, and since this choice is the result of the wish of the ancestors, the chosen daughter, if she is married, must be divorced from her husband, in order that she may be free to marry the man of her mother's family chosen for her. In making the choice, age is also disregarded, while if the union produces no offspring, the property goes to the head of the extended family and becomes family property.

This is not always the case, however, for another attempt to provide a successor may be made. If all the daughters of the sister to whom the property was confided have died without offspring, then the daughter of a maternal aunt is called, and, as was the case described before, she is married to a man of the extended family. If she has a child, this child inherits. If there are still no children, a brother of the founder of this compound by the same father, though not necessarily the same mother, is given a wife and, if he has children, they will inherit. If he has none they seek no farther, but "suppress" the compound which is allowed to fall into ruin. In such a case, this compound is regarded as one which, for some reason, the ancestors do not wish to be inhabited. The palm-groves and other property associated with it move into the category of "ancestral" possessions and are reserved for the rites in honor of those who had lived in the deserted dwellings.

¹ It may be recalled here again that in the Dahomean patrilineal system of descent, the children of the deceased woman would not belong to her own relationship group, but to that of her husband, and that this marriage would therefore be quite proper.

The development of the extended family into a sib is a matter of time and growth. It may be assumed that the founding of the extended family and collectivity that has been considered, has taken place at Abomey. At a later time, perhaps a younger member of a given generation, one who has no chance of succession, goes to Whydah to seek his fortune. There he cultivates his fields, plants palm-trees, marries, and has children. He builds a compound in the manner that has been described above, and in the course of time dies, his oldest son inheriting him. On the death of this son, a younger one takes his place, separating the compound, and installing the oldest son of his dead brother in the new dwelling. When this process has continued long enough another collectivity, a new extended family has been formed, related to the one in Abomey. In the first compound of this new collectivity lies the body of its founder—the man who left Abomey to come to Whydah, and his spirit is the principal ancestor of this extended family. A short time after the son who moved to Whydah left his ancestral home, another younger son, who, like the other, could see no opportunity to obtain the succession, also leaves to make his own way, going north among the Maxi. He builds a compound, marries, has children, and eventually dies. His first son inherits and dies, and the second son builds a compound for the eldest son of the first. The process is repeated as before, so that after a time a third extended family related to the other two and owing its allegiance to the home of the original founder in Abomey exists in the north. Later, other men of the family go to still different parts of Dahomey to make their homes, each building a compound and eventually creating a collectivity which is subsidiary to the original one in Abomey. When a number of extended families have been founded they constitute a sib, into which the relationship group founded by A has now grown.

Obviously, the process described above has not often occurred in its entirety, nor are new sibs constantly being founded. However, the process of inaugurating new compounds is going on, and new extended families do undoubtedly split off from time to time. As shown below, new sib groups are still in the process of formation, for when the extended families are separated from the center of the sib to which their founder belonged, and are established in localities far removed, it is a burden for their representatives to be compelled to make the long journey when sib councils are called, or when their presence at ancestral ceremonies is required.

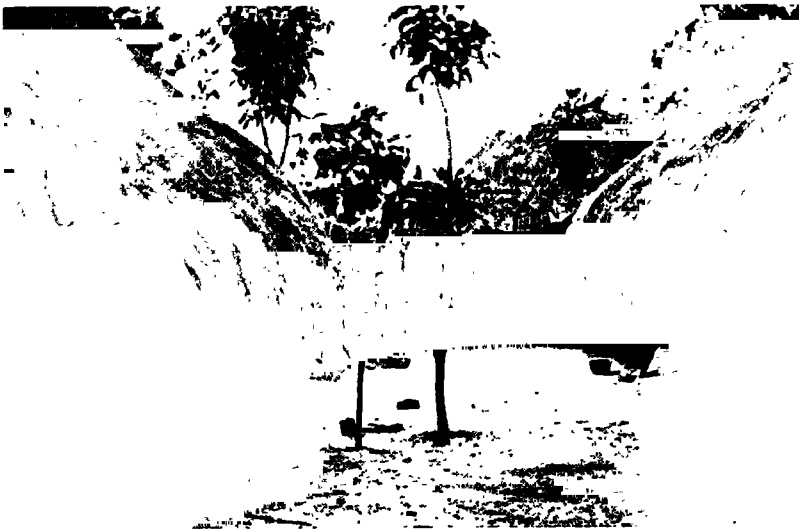
One specific instance of this character was encountered during this field work. This had to do with a certain extended family which, belonging to a sib whose ancestral compound is in Abomey, has its residence in Allada, some seventy kilometers distant. In the course of a year, the head of this extended family makes many journeys from Allada to Abomey to consult with the sib-head, and to attend ancestral ceremonies. Furthermore, it is necessary for the Allada branch to send substantial contributions to Abomey for administering the affairs of the sib and particularly for the "customs" held to honor the souls of the sib-members who have died. In the phrasing of the Allada group, it was stated that their own ancestral spirits were becoming restless at this state of affairs. Consultation with the diviner has revealed that the spirits of the Allada group have a great attachment for their own town; that they resent being called to the distant ancestral home at Abomey; and that they desire that their cult be "established" at the central shrine of the extended family in Allada. At the time the matter was discussed with members of this extended family, it was declared that they were even then putting away money in anticipation of the large expenditure necessary for the "establishment" of the ancestors.¹ Thus this process of fissure, by means of which not only new compounds and new extended families, but even perhaps new sibs are created, seems to be not entirely a thing of the past. It would seem further that the ability of informants to describe in such detail the manner in which these groups are founded and maintained suggests that the eventuality of such occurrences is present in the minds of the Dahomeans.

That the inner organisation of the sib indicated above does actually exist, however, cannot be doubted. Thus the head of the original collectivity of the first extended family of the sib is the head of his sib, and whenever instructions must be given the chiefs of the extended families within the sib, these men repair to the compound of the founder to consult with the sib-head. In the event of the death of this chief, all the heads of collectivities assemble for a council, held at the ancestral seat, and this council selects the oldest male member of the sib to succeed to the headship. In the case of the hypothetical sib which has been considered, such a man might come from one of the collectivities at a considerable distance from Abomey, yet on his selection, he would be required to leave his place of residence and, bringing his immediate family with him, take up his residence in the

¹ This elaborate rite is detailed below, pp. 195 ff.



a) Overlooking a compound in the city of Abomey.



b) A corner of the compound; houses where the wives of the owner live.

Plate 29



a) Priests of Agasú at Allada.



b) Inside the compound which contains the shrine to Agasú at Allada.

compound of the founder. On the death of this man, these people would return to the compound from which they had come, unless some of the children, fancying their new place of residence, should make a compound for themselves, and thus begin to establish still another sub-division of the sib. Since the oldest male must head the sib, it is obvious that his tenure of office is seldom long and that this system, therefore, makes for a considerable degree of moving about.

To turn from the genetic consideration of Dahomean social organisation to an analysis of relationship terminology should further clarify this aspect of the culture. The system in use is essentially designatory in character, for as will be seen, practically every relative may be described by a term which specifies his relationship to the speaker. Though descent is counted unilaterally, a full terminology to be applied to maternal relatives is provided. Again, though the system is classificatory in feeling, the individual members of any relationship group, when spoken of, are referred to by the term which exactly defines their place in the family in relation to the speaker, rather than by a classificatory term.¹

In the terminology itself the members of the immediate family may first be designated. The word *tó*, "father," is used only for the real male parent of the speaker, while the term *dá* may be employed for any member of one's family older than the speaker, whether he be father, father's brother, grandfather, grandfather's brother.² Though *tóchì* (literally, "father-my") is used in speaking of one's father, *dá* is preferred in address. *Nò* is the term of address for "mother," though in reference *nóchì* ("mother-my") is used. *Táyì* is employed in addressing all the old women of the speaker's family. There are no terms of address for brother and sister, but their names are used when speaking to them. In reference, however, *novichì sínù*, (literally, "mother-child-my male") is used for brother and *novichì nyónù* (literally "mother-child-my female") for sister. The terms for brother and sister apply here, as in most polygynous West African cultures, to those of the speaker's generation who have the same father as the speaker; it is not necessary that those called brother and sister have the same mother. Oldest brother, therefore, would be the oldest son of the speaker's father and is spoken of as *medaxóchi* ("person-older-

¹ Comparison may be made of the Dahomean relationship system with that of the Glidyí Ewe as given by Westermann (III), pp. 151-160.

² The terms for "father" may also be applied to an older brother who has taken a deceased father's place as head of the family.

my"), for second older brother the term is *novichî bɛdédɛ* ("mother-child-my second"), for third older brother *novichî atɛgɔ*, ("mother-child-my third"), and so on for as many older brothers as one may have. One does not distinguish between brothers younger than oneself. As a matter of practice, all older brothers may be designated by the term for "oldest brother," while if the proper word for "female" be inserted, any of these terms may be used to designate sister. A term for "brother," which may be employed when referring to a brother by the same father but not the same mother, but which is actually only used when one is specifically asked whether a given brother has the same two parents as the one spoken to, is *tovichî* ("father-child-mine"). The term for a male child is *nyavi*, for female *nyɛkpovi*. Though these terms are applied by parents to their children, their use is not restricted to parents alone, for any older person may employ them to call any child whose name is not known to him, whether he be a relative or not.¹

Any elderly male belonging to one's own sib is called *dá* in ordinary practice. However, if a person must specify the exact relationship in which he stands to such a person, as in a court, the following terminology is employed:

- tíchínovi*, — father's brother (lit., "father-my-mother-child")
tíchínovidaxó, — my father's elder brother
tíchínovimevi, — my father's younger brother

The term for "my brother" may be employed as a familiar form of address for the sons of the speaker's father's brothers. However, this is not often done, the preferred usage is to call the person by his given name, and is based on the assumption that one is familiar with the members of one's own generation who belong to one's own compound or extended family. In designating such persons, however, one would say:

- tíchínòvivi*, — my father's brother's son, or
tíchínòvivinyónu, — my father's brother's daughter

The term for brother, furthermore, is often used in greeting a friend, while the term for "father-my" is employed to convey respect toward any elderly man. *Nyɛni* ("my friend") is often used as a term of address, and again, as in European culture, may be applied to persons whom one has never seen before.

¹ In much the same way as "son" is employed in our culture by an older man to designate any boy.

In a compound, two main categories of persons are recognised. The first of these are the *akovi*, "children of the family," divided into *akovisunù* and *akovinyonù*, these being the males and the females of the group. The second category is *akosi*, that is, the wives of the *akovi*. Residence being patrilocal, the husbands of daughters of the compound need not be counted. In the line of direct descent the terminology is as follows:

<i>vi</i> ,	— son
<i>vivú</i> ,	— son's son
<i>vivù</i> ,	— son's son's son
<i>vitiklì</i> ,	— son's son's son's son
<i>vizǎ</i> ,	— son's son's son's son's son
<i>vivà</i> ,	— son's son's son's son's son's son

The same terms are used for daughters as for sons, for the literal meaning of the word *vi* is "child," and the translation of the terminology is literally, "child," "child's child," and so on. The terminology is not extended beyond the sixth generation. It is considered that after this, as the Dahomeans phrase it, "it goes into the family," and relationship is not counted. Reciprocally the terms, for males, are as follows:

<i>táchì</i> ,	— my father
<i>tágbóchì</i> ,	— my father's father
<i>tágbóchító</i> ,	— my father's father's father
<i>tágbóchítágbò</i> ,	— my father's father's father's father
<i>tágbótágbóchító</i> ,	— my father's father's father's father's father ¹

After this it again "goes into the family," the next generation merely being called *xenu*, "family," and there being no further counting. For females in the ascending line the terms are:

<i>nòchì</i> ,	— my mother
<i>nónóchì</i> ,	— my mother's mother
<i>nónóchinò</i> ,	— my mother's mother's mother
<i>nágbóchinò</i> (or <i>nónóchinógbò</i>),	— my mother's mother's mother's mother

One does not count beyond this, since it is said that a woman rarely lives to see her *vizǎ* — her children of the fifth descending generation. Men are reputed to be longer lived, and are said often to see the sixth generation of their descendants before they die. In spite of this feeling, so clearly does the Dahomean understand the descriptive character of his relationship terminology that it was quite possible to

¹ A variant of this term is *tágbóchítágbótágbò*.

go on with the terminology; thus, on the mother's side, the words *nonochinogbónogbò*, "my mother's mother's mother's mother's mother" and *nogbónogbochinò*, "my mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother," are given readily enough when called for.

To designate the fathers of the women in the list given above, one adds *tó* to each of the above, (*chitò*, if the word for "my" be included), thus:

<i>nochitò</i> ,	— my mother's father
<i>nochitògbó</i> ,	— my mother's father's father
<i>nochitòtgbó</i> ,	— my mother's father's father's father
<i>nochitòtgbótgbó</i> .	— my mother's father's father's father's father

On the other side, the corresponding terms are:

<i>táchino</i> ,	— my father's mother
<i>táchinonò</i> ,	— my father's mother's mother
<i>táchinononò</i> ,	— my father's mother's mother's mother
<i>táchinonogbó</i> ,	— my father's mother's mother's mother's mother
<i>táchinonogbonogbo</i>	— my father's mother's mother's mothers' mother's mother

The variants of these terms, such as "my mother's mother's father," or "my father's mother's father" follow regularly, and are easily formed by making the proper changes in the terms given above.

Descriptive terms in current usage for collateral relatives are as follows:

<i>nochinoví</i> ,	— my mother's brother
<i>nochinovínyónù</i> ,	— my mother's sister
<i>nochinoviví</i> ,	— my mother's brother's son
<i>nochinovivínyónù</i> ,	— my mother's brother's daughter
<i>nochinovínyónù</i> ,	— my mother's sister's son
<i>nochinovínyónúvì</i> ,	— my mother's sister's daughter
<i>nochitónoví</i> ,	— my mother's father's brother
<i>togbochinóvì</i> ,	— my father's father's brother
<i>tachinovínyónù</i> , or <i>dányónúchì</i> ,	— my father's sister
<i>dányónúchiví</i> , or <i>tachinoviví</i> , or <i>táchinovínyónúvì</i> ,	— my father's sister's son

It was pointed out that there is no term for "father's father's brother's son's son," or relatives of one's own generation who are farther removed in relationship. All such persons are called *mèchi*. For children of a parent's brother or sister, however, the terms given above are used.

The terminology employed by those who are married to designate the members of their spouse's family is no less designatory in character

than that applied to one's own family. If the speaker is a man, then the following are employed:

novichési, — brother's wife
asichínovi, — wife's brother
novichésu, — sister's husband

If the speaker is a woman, she uses the following:

novichési, — brother's wife
asuchínovi, — husband's sister
novichésu, — sister's husband

As between spouses themselves, it is customary for a wife to use the term *asúchi* ("husband-mine") in speaking of her mate, though in address the term varies with her status as regards children. After her marriage and until she is pregnant, she addresses her husband by the term *medaxó* ("older person"). Once pregnant, she changes to the term for father, *dá*, which she continues to employ in addressing her husband until her first child begins to talk, the reason given for this being that the first words of a child are "*Da, da, da, da.*" This usage is followed only in the case of the first child. From the time this child begins to speak until he is adolescent, the wife uses a teknonymic for her husband, calling him "father of" her child. Thus, if the child's name were Bösú, the wife would call her husband Bösutó. After this the wife returns to the term *medaxó*, addressing her husband as *medaxóchi*.

The manner in which a husband addresses his wife is somewhat more complicated. When he speaks of his wife, he calls her *asichi*, though if she is his first wife and the occasion on which he refers to her is a ceremonial one, he speaks of her as *hvesidáxò* ("house-wife-eldest"). Other wives may be spoken to as *asisichi* or referred to as *asisi*. Most often, however, when a woman is addressed by her husband he uses a name of his own invention, which he has derived from some circumstance surrounding his marriage or on the wooing of the woman he marries. This name is announced during the marriage ceremony, and is the one by which the woman is thereafter known, not only to her husband but to all her acquaintances.¹ This usage may be made somewhat clearer if examples are given of the manner in which one man chose the marriage-names of the first six of his wives.² He was

¹ A fiancé, in speaking to his betrothed, merely employs the name of the village from which she comes, or if she comes from a city, he uses the name of her quarter in addressing her.

² It is probable that this account is somewhat idealised as far as the one who gave it is concerned; there is no question as to the correctness of the procedure as it is outlined.

first married when he was seventeen years of age. He knew, so he said, a number of men who, even at the age of thirty or forty, were bachelors. They envied him the opportunity given him by his father of marrying when he was so young, and realizing their envy, he named his first wife *T'òndósè*, "So-my-ears-have-heard." Thus the connotation of this saying was that he himself had never experienced the life of a celibate, but has only heard it spoken of. His second wife was very beautiful and many others were desirous of marrying her. For four months it was uncertain who would be successful, but when the decision was made, and the marriage took place, the bridegroom announced her name as *Édjemè*, "She-prefers-me."

The name of his third wife was derived from an argument which this man advanced to his father and which convinced his parent that he should have this woman. He had told his father that if the line was to be preserved, it must be made possible for his son to marry while young. He added that he was most appreciative of what his father had already done for him, and that, if he lived, he would see to it that his father's name was not allowed to die. Hence, when he married this wife, he bestowed on her the name of *T'ínyínnátí*, "My-father's-name-shall-live."

The fourth wife this man married was also given him by his father, and her name was derived from the following circumstance: When the diviner throws his lots and consults Fate, he employs the fruit of the type called *fédì*. The fruit of this tree is used for no other purpose, whereas palm-oil is made from the fruit of several other varieties of palm-trees. Now, when this man had been given his first three wives by his father, his cousins gossiped about him, saying that he was too young to have so many women. Yet he was to have four, while each of these envious ones had only one or two wives. Hence this wife's name *Fedímè*, was derived from the aphorism composed by this man for the occasion — "My father loves me, so that I am as one born of the sacred *fédì* palm-tree; those others who criticize me are as though they were born of common types of palm-trees."

This so pleased the father that the very next day he sent his son yet another wife. When this girl came to the home of the young man, he could not believe that this was not a joke played on him, and so he returned her to his father. But the girl was sent to him once again with the question. "What will you name her?" Thereupon she was called *Chiwaiyì*, "My-future-is-assured." Since in the course of three

months this father had given his son three wives, his future was so well assured that he now wished for nothing so much as his father's long life. Thus the father's question "And when I am dead, what will happen to you?" was answered with the reminder that the father himself was the son of King Glele, who had had many sons older than he, and that these brothers had many unmarried sons older than the speaker. Now, just as their fathers were older and less prosperous than his father, so their unmarried sons were older than himself, and all were envious of his father or of him. But with these three wives in three months, his future was so secure, that he might compose the name he gave this wife.

After his fifth marriage the young man went on a journey that kept him away about a year, and it was not until after his return that he married his sixth wife. He called her *Yekpéwǎ*, "I have no conquerors." This saying was a boast at the expense of an acquaintance who, having only two wives when this man had four, would never have more than half as many as he.

The naming of a wife at the marriage ceremony is part of a complex of name-giving rituals that is deep-seated in Dahomean culture. In describing the ceremony for the installation of the *dokpweḡḡ*, it was remarked how the culminating moment was when the appointee arose and pronounced his new name. Every exploit in a man's life is signalized by the choice of a new name for himself, and a man's position in a community is enhanced by his resourcefulness in originating for himself ingenious names.¹ When a man who is about to marry is unable to devise a suitable name for his wife, it is possible for him to continue calling her by the name of her village or quarter. This, however, is regarded as inept and as cause for shame, so that a man who cannot think of a clever name for his new wife secretly has recourse to someone in the village, usually a singer who has shown talent in devising names, and this man, for a consideration, supplies him with a suitable name for the girl. At the opportune moment the bridegroom will, to be sure, pronounce it publicly as a name of his own invention.

Another phase of Dahomean social organisation has to do with what has been aptly termed the "playmate" relationship and its associated taboos. In the present instance, information concerning these configurations developed from an analysis of the significance

¹ See Burton, vol. i, pp. 245-246, for a description of the scene when a new chief pronounced his "strong names" before Glele. Dalzel (pp. 156-158) gives in some detail the manner in which a new name was taken for himself by Kpengla.

of the terms employed by a person toward his spouse's grandparents. In address, a woman calls her husband's grandfather *asúchi*, "my husband," and this usage reflects the existence of a playmate relationship that prevails not only between persons who stand in this relationship to one another, but between numerous others. Thus, a woman may joke with all her husband's brothers, whether these brothers have the same mother or not, regardless of age, the reason for this being that when the husband dies, some of his wives become the wives of his brothers. However, although a man's sons may also inherit his wives, there is no joking between these sons and the wives of their father. A man may joke with his mother-in-law, in spite of the fact that the feeling between mother-in-law and son-in-law is ordinarily not too cordial. It was stated, indeed, that mothers-in-law and sons-in-law joke all the more for this reason. Parent-in-law taboos are evidently not found in this culture, though joking between a man and his father-in-law is not encouraged. Among the people who live at Agoli and Zagnanado it is customary for a man on meeting his father-in-law to cover his face, and it is also stated that in these districts these two must not eat out of the same dish. In Abomey, however, the only prohibitions are that a man may not sleep in the same room with his mother-in-law, or a woman with her father-in-law. Brothers-in-law are often very close friends, and sisters-in-law usually joke with each other, but this is only an indication of the freedom bred of more or less intimate everyday contact. A mother-in-law may joke with her daughter-in-law, because the mothers of both the bride and the groom supervise the first sexual contacts between a man and his wife. A man may not joke with his father's brothers, but he may do so with the brothers of his grandfather. A girl may not joke with her maternal aunts because it is said, "It is not a mother who corrects her child, but her sisters." However, since the mother's sisters are often with a mother, and girls may discuss all matters of sex with their mothers in the freest manner possible, a girl who wishes to speak to her mother of some intimate occurrence in the presence of a mother's sister will first pronounce the word *káflà*, "Do not listen to the words I am going to say." Having spoken this word, the girl may say anything she likes.¹

As has been said, a son-in-law may make free with his wife's mother and grandmother. As is the case between a wife and her husband's

¹ This word is also had recourse to in ordinary conversation, and after it has been spoken, anything may be said with social immunity from an angry reply.

mother, this is permitted because these women are the ones who supervise the first sex-relations between husband and wife. To joke with the father of one's wife, however, is very strictly forbidden, for this "would inform the father of what the man had done to his daughter." A daughter-in-law, however, not only jokes freely with her father-in-law but is obliged to do so, because "it is he who received the cloth on which the first marital consummation was had"—the cloth showing whether or not she was a virgin at her marriage. It is held natural for a girl to joke with her mother, but not with her father, and a boy may joke about sexual matters with neither parent. For "talk of these things before parents is insulting; children must not discuss what gave them their birth." In a word, a man may joke with all the relatives of his wife except his father-in-law, and he may also make free with his own grandparent of the opposite sex. A girl makes free with her grandfather, but a boy, although he need not act respectfully toward this relative—he may take a seat in his presence, or, as a child, may pull his ears—must not joke sexually with him. Similarly, a girl will not joke sexually with her grandmother. As has been seen, a woman who has married into a family will joke with both the grandfather and grandmother of her husband, calling her grandfather "my husband." In like manner, one may joke with great-great-grandparents. As for one's own generation, brothers, sisters, and cousins indulge in the greatest possible freedom, stopping only short of actual sexual contact, and, should they be members of the royal sib, not stopping at that point.

It will be noted how, in this discussion of those with whom a person may make free, both the maternal and paternal relatives are included. Yet, as has been seen, the rule of descent is patrilineal. It is, therefore, not without interest to investigate the relationship between a person and his mother's family, to see whether in this strong patrilineal society where legalism is so highly developed, the mother's social group has any hold on the child or is of any significance for this person, who, legally, stands in no relationship whatever to his mother's kin.¹ That in this case the legal position gives way to a more human one is apparent from a consideration of the matter of inheritance, for, as has been noted, children are said never to quarrel over the disposal of a mother's property as they do over that of a father. When the matter is pursued

¹ There are some forms of marriage where control of the children remain in the hands of the mother (see below, pp. 317 ff.). However, sib-affiliation is always dictated by patrilineal descent, except in certain very special cases, as, e.g., that of royalty.

farther, it is found that this is reflected generally in the attitude held toward mother's and father's relationship groups. For in the main, the tie which binds a person to his father's family is a legal one, while that which binds him to his mother's family is one of sentiment. In a father's home there is an austerity toward the child that never obtains at the mother's house, or among members of the mother's family. The reason for this is the same as for the different attitudes toward the division of father's as against mother's property—whereas a father belongs to the children of many women, a mother is shared with few others. As a result, a strong affection develops between a mother and child that extends to and is reciprocated by the mother's kin. When a child visits the ancestral ceremonies of the sib or extended family of his mother, he may take for himself anything he wishes, his special right being to the animals that have been sacrificed or are about to be killed. One informant with whom this matter was discussed said that he himself had taken a sheep a few days before, and that this act, far from arousing anger, brought him approbation and additional gifts. The explanation for this lies in the belief that the ancestors are pleased when a daughter's child takes an interest in the ceremonies for them, and that it is their will that an animal taken by a maternal grandchild be not replaced, because this gesture is as gratifying to them as an actual sacrifice. Such an occurrence at the ceremony for the paternal ancestors would not only be unthinkable, but absurd, for the paternal ancestors constitute one's own ancestors, and "one may not take back what one has made a gift of," as the informants emphasized.

Another manifestation of the nature of the feeling toward the maternal family is had in instances where a man finds himself in difficulties. Let us suppose a man is assessed a fine which he is unable to pay. Very often, in such an event, a man prefers to go to his mother's family rather than his father's, for from his father and paternal uncles he may expect only the sternness that goes with the role of those who direct the life of a child, whereas from the mother's family he will receive both aid and tolerance. Moreover, if a man has no close relatives on his father's side, and the most distant ones refuse to pay the fine, his mother's people will provide what funds are required, "to save their daughter from hurt." Numerous other examples of this attitude are to be seen in the conduct of Dahomeans with whom one comes into everyday contact. In watching the behavior of children and mothers as compared with that of children and fathers, a notable degree of relaxation is to be observed in the presence of the former.

An outstanding instance of the closeness of the relationship between mother and child in this patrilineal society was had in connection with the recording of songs. The chiefs in particular were impressed with the recording phonograph, and the request came again and again to record music sung by choruses of their wives in the intimacy of the inner courts of their compounds. Occasionally a chief himself would sing, and there was great pride in the excellence of the recordings. It was not long after one of these chiefs had recorded some songs, that a message came asking that the phonograph be brought to his compound together with the records he had already made. He explained that he had sent especially for his mother so that she might enjoy hearing the songs he had sung into the phonograph. Later, when the apparatus was set up, the behavior of the son toward the mother was solicitous in the extreme. He caused her to be seated on the most comfortable stool, placed where she could best hear the music and, though when he commanded his wives and subordinates he was imperious, and his slightest desire was promptly gratified, he was both gentle and affectionate with her.

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is also very close, and the young children often live with their grandparents by preference. There is, indeed, the saying that a man's grandchildren are his true children. It is said that boys are closest to their father's father, while the girls are drawn to the mother's mother, this again affording an instance where personal ties transcend the dictates of a prevailing relationship system. The children may live with their grandparents until perhaps eighteen or twenty years of age. Most often they take their meals with the paternal grandmother, but after eating the boys go to the house of their paternal grandfather, the girls to their maternal grandmothers. It often happens, further, that a boy's needs are provided by his grandfather who, if he lives, may even continue his care for his grandchild until the latter marries and begins a family of his own.

Chapter IX

THE SIB ORGANISATION OF DAHOMEY

In any analysis of the social organisation of Dahomey, the great patrilineal relationship groupings must be accorded a major position. Although the residence of those who belong to any one sib is distributed over the whole of Dahomey, its head, as has been indicated, must reside at that place which tradition recognizes as the locale where the sib originated. Subordinate units of the sib, consisting of extended families, are found in various parts of Dahomey, and, though each has its own chieftain, they are responsible to the sib-head. As these units become large and of themselves powerful, they grow restless under the control exerted from a distance, and this, it may be deduced, is not only the manner in which new sibs branch off and take their place in the roster of Dahomean relationship groups, but may also be assumed to be the reason why, in giving a list of sibs such as that to be presented below. Dahomeans sometimes manifest a lack of certainty as to the independence of a given sib, disagreeing as to whether, of two sibs, one of them is or is not a branch of the other.¹

Every sib has a well-defined internal organisation. Its head, called *xenúgǎ*—sib chief—the oldest living male member of the group, constitutes the link between the living and the dead sib-members—that is, he is said to be “between the two worlds.” In making decisions he is aided by a council of the older men and women of the sib, composed of his brothers, sisters, or other collateral relatives of his own generation. His power, with but few exceptions, extends over all children of the men of his sib. This is true not only of those born of marriages where the father controls the children, but also, in the main, of the types where the children remain under the tutelage of their mother, for it is only under very special circumstances that a child may be counted a member of his mother’s sib, since the soul of every infant, no matter what the contractual marriage arrangement of its parents may have been, is held to be derived from the soul of a paternal ancestor.² While every male may look forward to holding the office

¹ See above, pp. 143–144.

² Exceptions to this statement are the children of princesses, who are specifically retained as members of the royal (i.e., mothers’) sib (below, pp. 326 ff.), and those offspring of *vúúótóhwe* and *vúúkpókúú* marriages retained by the mothers’ family (below, pp. 422 ff. and 424 f.).

of sib-chief if he lives long enough, it is rare that any one individual retains this office for any length of time, for a man is old when he assumes the sib headship, and the exigencies of the life span of the individual limit his tenure. Native belief, however, does not look to such a naturalistic cause for an explanation of this phenomenon. For the Dahomean, it is rather the continuous contact with the world of the dead which a sib-head maintains that exposes him at all times to the danger of imminent death. Thus, as will be seen later, should the sib-head forget the name of a single one of the family dead when the souls of the ancestors are "established" as deities, the anger of the forgotten soul will cause his death. It is, indeed, for this reason that the task of establishing a cult-house to train priests for the ancestral cult of all Dahomey has been neglected from year to year until the situation has at the present time come to be regarded as spiritually critical. Each successive head of the royal sib, in whose hands must lie the responsibility for organizing that cult-house, has proved unwilling to undertake this duty at the cost of shortening his own life.¹

After the sib-head, the *akovi*—the old women of the sib—rank next in importance, the oldest woman of each extended family being designated as a member of this group. Except for the three eldest of these women, they continue to live in the collectivity where they have made their residence. They minister to the everyday needs of the group to which they belong, giving food to the souls of the ancestors, pronouncing the blessings on married couples, or performing other daily functions of sib-life. All women who have reached their menopause are called *tásinò*, though this term is sometimes interchanged with *akovi*. There are, however, two categories of *akovi*, this larger group, and the "real" *akovi*, those who officiate at funerals. These comprise the two or three oldest women of the sib, and they reside at its principal collectivity. Whenever a sib-member dies, one of them must go to the place where the death has occurred, and must remain there until the end of the ceremonies at which her services are needed. These oldest women of the sib are termed *akovizokpé*, to distinguish them from the larger group of ordinary *akovi*.

The *akovizokpé* have a place of highest importance in sib councils. When it happens that the oldest of these, known as the *táyinò*, is of greater age than the head of the sib, her opinion on a given matter

¹ See below, pp. 228–229, for a full exposition of the importance of this situation.

is often more important than that of the sib-head, and this chief would himself feel the most extreme reluctance to thwart her wishes, or to fail to follow her advice. Furthermore, when a new head of a collectivity or compound is to be installed, it is this oldest *akovi*, the *táyinò*, who must ceremonially confirm the candidate. Before the conquest, each head of a collectivity was recognized by royal authority. On the death of one of these, the heir who had been named by the first friend and confirmed by the sib or who, following a dispute, was entrusted with the headship of his deceased father's collectivity, was sent to the King by the head of the family with such items of the inheritance as were movable that he might be installed. At the palace, the King caused official proclamation to be made of this; while the new chief kneeled before him with all the members of the collectivity, and the *Mɔ̀ngá* symbolically "put in his hands" that which was to be under his control. After being thus approved politically, he entered the house of his father where the rite of family confirmation was held, involving essentially his acceptance by the ancestors. This was the task of the *táyinò* who, bringing out the stool of the deceased chief which was that of an early ancestor, took the heir by the shoulders and seated him on it seven times. Once seated, she "put into his hands" all the possessions he had inherited, and then placed between his hands the hands of all persons over whom he was to have jurisdiction. This done, she sprinkled the earth seven times with water, calling on all those who had once lived there, and blessing the new chief in their name by giving him water to drink—water being a symbol of coolness, and hence peace. The most compelling expression of the power of the *akovi* is the fear she arouses in every Dahomean that if he came into her bad graces, she might, when serving at the altars of the ancestors, give a bad report of an offender—and "the dead listen to these women."

It has been stated that the control exercised by the sib-chief derives from the fact that he is the representative of the ancestors. These ancestors take precedence according to age, the oldest being most powerful. Hence it is the *tshwiyó*, as the ancestor held to be the actual human founder of each sib is called, who heads the ancestral cults and wields the greatest power over his descendants.¹ Yet, in spite of the

¹ Cf. Le Herissé (p. 372),—"La fondation d'une tribu tient presque toujours de la fable. Son ancêtre a été divinisé et est devenu un fétiche (*vódoun*). Si en parlant de cet ancêtre on veut faire allusion à sa qualité de fondateur, on l'appelle *tohovi* Le *tohovi* . . . peut être un animal ou une plante, ou un être humain qui, à sa mort, a su s'incarner dans une source, un rocher, du sable, de la glaise, etc. . . ."

fact that the rule of the *tshwiyó* over every member of his sib is of the strictest, there is no concept in Dahomean belief that is more difficult for the native to describe cogently than this.¹

First of all it must be recalled that the sib is comprised of the living and dead descendants of its founder—the *tshwiyó*—who rules as an absolute monarch over the familial destiny of the living, to the end that the sib may grow and prosper. In this rule, the *tshwiyó* is assisted by all the dead ancestral generations that have succeeded him. But whereas the ancestors, if not angered, lend their energies primarily to giving material aid to their living descendants, the *tshwiyó* passes judgment on his descendants, and as monarch, he judges the misdeeds involving the death sentence. These dead he replaces with more promising births. Like any human ruler who has proclaimed laws that govern his subordinates, he is jealous that they be observed.

To explain the concept of the origin of the *tshwiyó*, it is essential to outline some mythical beliefs which indicate the world-view of the Dahomeans.² It is believed that in very ancient days, after the Sky god had partitioned the universe among her children, there were already men on earth, though these lived but a poor existence. Mawú, this god, thereupon sent Gú, god of metal and stone, and, according to some accounts Lísá, the Sun, to give tools to man, with which he might the better cope with his environment. It is therefore said that Gú and Lísá are to be regarded as the first founders of sibs, since on their visits to earth they mated and pointed the way toward an organized social life. The earth, however, was as yet but sparsely populated when still later the sons of Fate came from the sky to preach the doctrine of Destiny, and to foretell that supernatural beings would appear and found family lines. As had been predicted, these beings did appear, springing from rivers, emerging from great holes in the earth, rending a mountain-side, falling from the sky with the rain, or climbing down the *lokó* tree. Each of these supernatural beings or phenomena mated with a human woman, and from such matings, in each instance, came the founders of the sibs. When death approached the supernatural father, who most commonly had assumed human guise while on earth, he called his oldest son and, revealing to him his real character, instructed him in his rôle as head of the great

¹ This was found to be the case not only in Dahomey, but also when accounts of the analagous beings who are worshipped in Western Nigeria and the Gold Coast were investigated. The concept of the *tshwiyó* will be more fully developed in later chapters dealing with the ancestral cult.

² These will be given in full when religion is discussed.

family to be descended from him, at the same time enjoining him to keep certain things sacred and to abstain from certain foods.¹

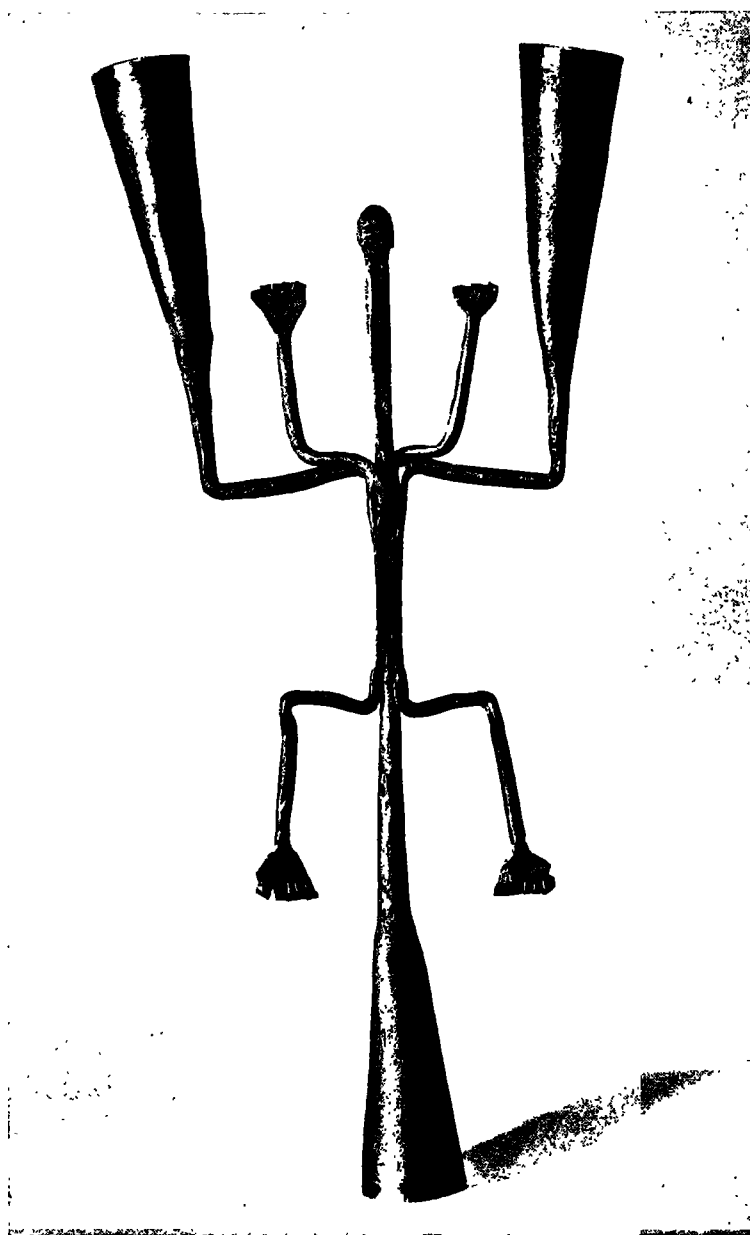
Having outlined the concept of the origin, nature and function of the *tohwiyo*, the matter of the institutionalized worship of the ancestors, and particularly of the *tohwiyo*, may be left at this point for a consideration of the more secular aspects of his rôle among the living, and the mechanisms that make possible the fulfilment of this rôle.² It will make for clarity, however, to digress here, and explain why the distinction is made between the institutionalized worship of a given *tohwiyo*, and his prerogatives and powers over his kinsmen. In the first category, the *tohwiyo* is a divinity who enjoys public worship under a priesthood, and by a cult-membership that has undergone initiation and need not necessarily consist exclusively of members of his own sib. As a point of fact, the royal *tohwiyo*, who receive the widest worship of any of these beings, do not derive a single member of their cult-group from their own sib, cult membership of any sort being prohibited members of the royal sib. Only those *tohwiyo*, however, who have founded families of prominence, and have thus proved their power, receive this public worship. On the other hand, the rôle of the *tohwiyo* in influencing the behavior of his descendants is a great one. He figures with special force in matters of marriage and divorce, and constitutes a court of highest recourse in any situation of stress resulting from a breach of faith between two sibs. Perhaps the most obvious effect had by the *tohwiyo* on the daily existence of his descendants is in the matter of the food and other taboos and injunctions for which his ultimate authority is taken for granted by every Dahomean.

These injunctions and prohibitions, which are held in all the sib mythologies to have been given by the supernatural founders to their descendants, are designated by the general term *sú*. Strictly speaking, however, taboos are termed *sú dúdù*, ("thing-forbidden-to-eat"), while those things which are enjoined are entitled *nowáidò*. These, like membership in the sib itself, are inherited through the father and must be observed for life.³ If a person commits a violation of his food

¹ Snelgrave remarks (p. 59) "... they have all their particular *Fetiches* after the same manner; Some being prohibited eating Fowls that have white Feathers; others, on the contrary, are to eat none that have black; Some are to eat no Sheep, others no Goats."

² For the discussion of the ancestral cult, see below.

³ Le Herissé (p. 372) may again be quoted in this connection, "Les descendants d'un même *tohwi* (ancêtre divinisé) et, dans certains cas, leurs alliés et ceux qu'ils ont absorbés par la conquête ou par lesquels ils ont été absorbés, obéissent



A copy of an iron dance-gong used in the ceremonies for the royal totem. The original is said to date from the time of King Agadja.

Plate 31



a) The chief-priest of the Nesúxwê cult in Abomey.



b) A woman in charge of a Nesúxwê ceremony.

taboos, either intentionally or unwittingly, and says nothing about it, then in ten or fifteen days a rash, called *saláwà*, appears on the skin. The members of his family know at once that he has profaned the sib ordinances, and steps are taken without further delay to appease the ancestors whose prohibitions have been violated. Let us suppose that this has been done by a member of the royal family, whose principal *tohwíyó* is Agasú. The offender would go to the chief-priest of this spirit, taking with him a cock, a chicken, a pot of the type called *ulègbá*, in which ablutions are performed, a mat, and seven francs fifty centimes. The priest would take certain leaves, and would place them in the pot, covering them with water and washing the offender with this medicine. The rash would then disappear after two or three days, when the person who had sinned would be shaved. So intrenched is the validity of this belief that one native of some European education told how he himself, during a visit to another colony, had eaten shell fish, one of his taboos, because he could not refuse what was offered him at the home of his host, and a few days later the rash appeared. For two months it persisted until, upon his return, he was able to go to the priest of his *tohwíyó* for relief. This does not mean that a person when travelling cannot take precautions against occurrences of this kind, for the same man stated that he would not have had to suffer from this rash had it not been for his thoughtlessness in leaving behind two kinds of leaves, which, chewed when the rash appears, "take the bad substance out of the blood."¹ That continued neglect is dangerous is indicated by the belief that this will bring on death, since leprosy will eventuate if the rash is not treated.

The existence of food taboos makes for difficulties in everyday social intercourse, since the *sú* of every sib are different. Good form demands that when guests are invited for a meal, for example, they arrive perhaps three hours before the time set for eating so that proper precautions may be taken. As each comes, his host inquires what it is he does not eat, and each type of food tabooed to any guest is cooked separately. In such a case, as a matter of general precaution, the flesh of goats or of chickens, and fish, corn, and millet would each be cooked

à des règlements particuliers. Le premier de ces règlements défend d'utiliser sous certaines formes la plante, l'animal, etc., qui rappellent le *tohoui*. Ainsi, dans le cercle d'Abomey, on rencontre des gens qui ne mangent pas de l'antilope, du mouton . . . qui ne tuent pas les aigles, les caméléons . . . qui n'utilisent pas certaines plantes."

¹ Several persons stated that while a European doctor can cure the rash, it will return after a time, if the medicine that has been supernaturally sanctioned is not also applied.

in different vessels. If a person who might not eat pepper in his soup because this was tabooed to him were present, a special soup without pepper would be prepared. However, the rules of good breeding forbid one to "command a host in his own home," and hence if a thoughtless host neglects to make inquiries as to the *sú* of his guests, then all must eat what is put before them.

A married woman is responsible only for the observation of the *sú* she has inherited from her own father. Even when she is pregnant, it is not necessary that a woman observe the taboos of her husband. Each sib, however, has special and very secret taboos which must be observed by a woman during her pregnancy, and of these a woman observes those of her husband's family. Only three examples of these could be obtained. Thus among the *Ayinóví Agbowótó* sib, a woman eats no salt for seven days. Among the *Ananóví Dokonù*, she sleeps on the bare ground for fifteen days, while the wife of a member of the *Djavi Gbàngbwénù* eats the meat of rats for sixteen days of her pregnancy.

An important general type of "things enjoined" clusters about marriage. Thus, in the description of the marriage of a princess of the royal house, it is a *nouaídò* that the clothing of the bride must all be white, that she must leave her father's house at night, that she must go to her husband's house on the back of a man called *mesí* ("man-horse"), to name but a few. That the house in which she is to live must be new, and that her husband shall never have entered it, constitutes another injunction, while the fact that she goes to market on the third day, and that not before the night of that day may she sleep with her husband, also comes under this heading. Ceremonies of this type are carried out so that the sib-head may notify his ancestors that a daughter or son of the family has been married. Another form which these positive injunctions take has to do with facial cuts, which vary from sib to sib. Thus the *Adjalénù* people make no cuts at all. The *Hwédánù* who live in Whydah, make two cuts on each cheek. The *Agblomenù*, who are considered a group of autochthonous inhabitants of the plateau of Abomey, make three cuts on each side of the face, one on the temple called *àdjàkàsí* (tail of a rat), and two on the cheek, both in front of the ear. The *Gedeví*, another aboriginal group near Abomey, distinguish themselves by means of three cuts on each temple. At the present time all Dahomeans are supposed to have three cuts on the temple, though the *Agblomenù* have suppressed the two of these three and only cut the "rat's tail."

It is difficult in the extreme to obtain a complete list of Dahomean sibs and their *tshwiyó*, to say nothing of their origin myths. So esoteric is this knowledge of sib origin, indeed, that it presents by far the most difficult phase of an investigation into Dahomean culture. The term esoteric, as here used, is not intended so much to convey the native inhibition to discuss these aspects of belief with an outsider as to state the Dahomean's attitude toward his own and other sib mythologies. It is necessary to make clear that any consideration of the reactions of immature men and women, who could not be expected to know their sib mythologies, is excluded, for to look to such persons for knowledge of this sort would be as though an investigator might go to a young person in our culture in search of genealogical information. It is the elders who alone possess this information, and to them it has come slowly. Some special dispute involving inheritance, or some special act of a kinsman that brought renown or disgrace, would on occasion bring into discussion kinship affiliations and tales of the history of the group, while at other times the rites of the ancestral cult, where the lore of the past is dramatised in rituals that bring some information even to the very young, would gradually build up in the developing man or woman a body of knowledge concerning his sib that would, in time, make him competent in this field. Yet concerning the past of sibs other than their own, these elders remained vague, their vagueness being reinforced by the Dahomean attitude that to tell the affairs of others is neither good form nor prudent.¹

In addition to ignorance of sib origins on the part of the young, reluctance to speak of these matters on the part of those who know them because of the sacred nature of the eldest, and hence most powerful members of the sibs who live in the next world also makes for difficulties in obtaining this information. As might be expected in the light of such an attitude, the greatest secrecy prevails concerning the founding phenomenon. Thus it is confided that many sibs, by their choice of euphemisms to replace the names of their animal forbears, indicate a desire to conceal the type of creature from which they are descended—and this obtains even though few would dare brave the supernatural vengeance meted out to one who had the temerity to taunt another with the inglorious characteristics of the

¹ The statement made by Rattray (Ashanti Law and Constitution, p. 65), would seem to indicate that this is a widespread West-African point of view: "In none of my inquiries have I encountered greater reluctance to discuss any subject than the question relating to clan origins. *Obi nkyere obi ase* ('One does not disclose the origin of another') is the usual reply to all such inquiries."

animal founder of the other's sib. Yet to attribute these euphemistic names to fear of derision alone would be to ignore the logic that governs other supernatural beliefs, a logic which holds that the greater the circumspectness with which these sacred matters are approached, the less opportunity there will be for those evilly inclined to utilize what has been told them to the disadvantage of the teller. Explicit comments on this point, characteristically enough, were of two kinds. Those who were of a habit of mind to accept the traditional, held that since the founder of the sib had had revealed to him in confidence the identity of his parent and the laws that were to govern his descendants, this confidence must be maintained, and such information must, therefore, not pass beyond the limits of the sib. Those of a more inquiring turn of mind, however, maintained that this secrecy permitted the elders the exercise of greater power over the behavior of the siblings under them than would otherwise be the case, and allowed more elaboration upon sib exploits to the end that greater glory might accrue to the group.

With these points in mind, therefore, a catalogue of the Dahomean sib-groups may now be ventured.¹ The full name of each sib, the name of its *tshwiyô*, something of its taboos and prescriptions, and as much of its origin myth as could be obtained, will be given.²

¹ According to the informant who gave the initial list of sibs, it was stated, after thirty-three sibs had been named, that the catalogue of the important ones was complete, but that in addition there were seven "small families." He stated that although these "small families" were not of great importance, some of them comprise large numbers of people. However, others who discussed the sibs were puzzled by the designation of "small families," and stated that there was no essential difference either in organisation or in importance between them and the "principal" ones. The only other objection found to the list was that the name of one sib was unknown to all except the original informant. In consequence, this will be omitted, and an additional sib, not named in the original catalogue, but given by a number of later informants, will be included in the list.

² Le Herissé (pp. 373-376) gives the following sib-names and something of their mythology—their *tshwiyô*, as given by him, the corresponding numbers in the listing of this and the succeeding chapter follows each name:

<i>Agasouvi Alada-Sadonou</i>	— <i>kpô</i> , (leopard)	— I
<i>Ayatovi Gammenou</i>	— <i>Gû, Mâsê, Lisa</i>	— XIX
<i>Adanlokovi Dooueno</i>	— <i>Adan</i> (?)	— not listed
<i>Aouammonvi Monkpanou</i>	— <i>aklasou</i> (vulture)	— not listed
<i>Adandovi Hezonno</i>	— <i>toke</i> (bat)	— XXIV
<i>Aghenouvi Ouelinou</i>	— <i>Dah</i>	— XVIII
<i>Ananouvi Dokonnou</i>	— <i>Bosikpô</i>	— X
<i>Akosouvi Madjanou</i>	—	— IX
<i>Gbokovi Gonlonhonou</i>	— <i>goat</i> ?	— not listed
<i>Djetovi</i>	—	— not listed
<i>Adjalenou Goudouvi</i>	—	— VIII

There is a high degree of correspondence between the two lists, both as to name of the sibs and as to the *tshwiyô* which they worship. The name given next to

I. *Gbekpóvi Aladáxonũ* (Human-Leopard-children Allada-ancient-people) — "*Children of the Leopard, who, of old, came from Allada.*"

This is the sib of the ruling family, and from this line all the kings of Dahomey have come. The principal *tshwiyó* of this sib, because of its political importance, is worshipped by all Dahomeans with elaborate rituals, in which the priests of these and other *tshwiyó* are joined by priests of the principal gods. This being, indeed, may almost be regarded as a national deity.¹ This is Agasú; in addition to him, the royal sib possesses two other *tshwiyó* of considerable, though not as great importance—Adjaxutó and Tèdo. Members of this sib do not eat the meat of the leopard (*kpó*), of the spotted antelope (*agbali*) or of any other spotted animal, because of their resemblance to the leopard. While they do eat the pigeon, it is held in respect. They refrain, in addition, from eating those things classified as *adakpě*—all crustaceae, turtles, and other shelled creatures—since these are believed to have helped the sib ancestors when they had difficulty crossing the rivers. A member of this sib must not be struck on the cheek,² nor may he be cicatrized on the cheek, but only on the temples. He may not live in a house built of wood from a kind of tree, used to make hedges, called *kpáti*. In the morning, when a

the last in the table above is not that of a sib, but is a general term for the indigenous inhabitants of the plateau of Abomey, who were subdued by the early Dahomean Kings. Le Herissé's comments (p. 372) on the construction of sib-names may be quoted as applicable to the terms listed here: "Le nom de chaque tribu met en évidence sa filiation et son origine. La filiation est indiquée par un mot que termine la syllable *vi*, fils de . . . ; l'origine par un mot que termine la syllabe *nou*, gens de . . ."

¹ Burton was greatly impressed with the position of the chief-priest of Agasú, the Agasún, as the following excerpt indicates (vol. i, p. 234): "Near it . . . sat . . . the representatives of the Agasun-no, the highest fetisheer in the city . . . When the Agasun-no appears in person before the monarch the latter must remove his sandals, prostrate himself before the church, kiss the ground, and throw a little dust upon his forehead, whilst all courtiers take a sand bath, and white men stand up and bow . . ." He errs as to the nature of this deity, when he says (vol. ii, p. 97): "Agasun, an old Makhi Fetish that ruled Agbome before Dako conquered it. It aided his enterprise, for which reason the Agasun-no, or head fetishman, is at the capitol equivalent to the Hu-no of Whydah." Skertchly concurs in this last statement, differing only in that he describes "Agasun" as "the original fetiche of Uhwahweh" (p. 472), but differs sharply from Burton in the place he assigns to the priest of this deity, "... Agasun, . . . the palladium of Dahomey, and one of the most powerful of the gods in the native pantheon. This priest is the head of all the metropolitan clergy, and the Agasunno are the cardinals of the Dahoman religion. The chief priest does not rank next to the king, as Burton says, for he forgot that His Majesty of Dahomey is as far above his subjects as Buddah is above his devotees; besides which, church and state have not the slightest connection as regards precedence." (p. 150) The last statement, of course, is not tenable.

² In this he has the prerogative of a cult-member vowed to the Great Gods.

member of this sib arises, he may not step from his sleeping-mat onto the floor if it has not been freshly swept. In the morning, also, a woman may not go into the kitchen of a member of this sib until she has washed. No one may put his finger in the soup of such a one, nor do the members of this sib eat when they are in the house of their *tshwiyô*.

The following tale gives an account of the origin of this sib, and shows why the members refrain from eating the principal tabooed animal:

In very ancient times, when animals and human beings lived together, Adjaxutô resided in a place called Adjatado. In this region were two women, the wives of the same man, who always quarrelled. One of them became pregnant and the other said, "It is an animal who has made you conceive." When the woman to whom this was said became the mother of this Adjaxutô, it was repeated by all that this child had been fathered by Kpô, the leopard, and so the women quarrelled until they fought. Adjaxutô, as he grew older, was angered by these quarrels, and, leaving Adjâ, went to Allada.

The people of Adjâ pursued Adjaxutô, and a war began which was fought from Allada to Adjâdji. The pursuing forces were more numerous than those of Adjaxutô, who when he saw this to be the case, stationed a friend at a strategic place and instructed him to send a warning when the pursuers were sighted. But this friend went to the people who were making war against Adjaxutô, and plotted with them to bring Adjaxutô into the power of the enemy. Adjaxutô, however, knew what his erstwhile friend had done, and killed him. Now the name of the friend was Kozoe, and from that time on Adjaxutô took a new name, saying, "I am now to be called Adjânù Kozoexutô (a man of Adjâ who killed Kozoe)."

As Adjaxutô warred against his enemies, one of those who aided him was named Têdo, and another Agasú. This latter one hunted for the other two, and kept them supplied with food. Today all three are worshipped as deities who came to Allada, the home of the Aladaxônù kings, but it was Agasú who first arrived there, for as the hunter it was he who found the road to this place. When the three reached Allada from Adjâ, Têdo said, "I am tired. I want to rest." So he took a by-path and sat down to rest, and it is here the temple of Têdo is found today.¹

Now though Adjaxutô went deeper into the bush, the people of Adjâ continued to follow him. But Adjaxutô had many charms and he carried a lance. He put his cloth on the ground and said, "Let a river spring up, so that I may be separated from my pursuers," and a river appeared. He took his lance and said, "I am going to throw you,

¹ Têdo figures unimportantly in the worship of the royal *tshwiyô* in Abomey; it is only in Allada that he is of importance.

and where you fall, there let me come and live without being molested by my enemies." As he said this, he threw his lance and told the people who were with him to find where the lance had fallen. But he cautioned them, saying, "When you see the lance, do not touch it." When the people told Adjaxutó they had found his lance, he went with them and said, "Good, it is here that I shall stay." And the place where he settled is called to this day Adjaxutóhwè, "the house of Adjaxutó," and it is here that people go when they perform ceremonies for Adjaxutó.

When Adjaxutó had settled there, he took wives who bore him children. These children were called *kpodjito*, the people born of the leopard, and their wives were called *kpòsi*. They began to conquer their neighbors, and they became kings, so that when anyone saw a king's wife, he called her "wife of the leopard," and when one of their children was seen, he was called *kpóvi*, a "child of the leopard." Everyone feared the descendants of Adjaxutó, and feared to touch anything that belonged to them. If a person saw a descendant of Adjaxutó he called out, "*Dada kpojito*—O king, descendant of the leopard," while all were afraid even to meet the leopard's wives, since it meant the death of one who did so.¹

Agasú was the child of the *tshwíyó* Adjaxutó, and while the royal family were united in Allada they worshipped Adjaxutó as the founder of their family. And to this day Adjaxutó ranks first among the *tshwíyó*, being worshipped by the members of the royal family in Allada. However, as time went on, new differences arose among the "children of the leopard," and some of the family made their way north to the environs of Abomey, where they extended territorial sway over a progressively greater area, until finally they came to rule over all of Dahomey. These people took Agasú and left Adjaxutó in Allada, and it is for this reason that Agasú is the principal *tshwíyó* of the royal family in Abomey.

Another version of this origin tale which accounts in somewhat different manner for the beginnings of the royal sib, is a variant of the popular Dahomean "animal wife" tale.

Agasú was a female leopard, who changed into a woman and bore to her husband the King of Adjâ, a son named Adjaxutó. When she took on human form, she exacted a promise from the King that he would not divulge her identity, but, faithless to his word, he told his other wives. Therefore, when he died and Adjaxutó was designated as his successor, the others would not have him, saying, "Should the son of a leopard rule over us?" Now, before her death, Agasú revealed the secret of her origin to her children, and instructed them that if anyone called them children of an animal, they should leave that country.

¹ Cf. Skertchly, p. 113: "If a 'leopard wife', as the wives of the king are called, journeys abroad, the Amazons themselves have to give way, and the men and women hurry from the path as though a man-eating tiger were approaching."

They had also promised her, at the same time, that should they go, they would disinter her bones to take with them, so that she might be a *rodú* (a god) for them, and watch over their undertakings to the end of bringing them prosperity and power. Wherefore, when the quarrels of the succession to the throne of Adjâ came about, Adjaxutó killed those who had insulted him, and escaping to Allada, took the bones of his mother, Agasú, there.

At Allada he met a man named Têdo, with whom he formed a friendship. Têdo promised to come to his aid when the men of Adjâ, who were pursuing him, came to kill him. Têdo, however, lost heart at the last moment, and gave him no help, but in spite of this, with his mother's protection, Adjaxutó alone prevailed against them. When Têdo heard of the outcome, in his shame he entered a large native jar and died, and, because Adjaxutó commanded that none of his descendants ever look upon the remains of Têdo, no members of the Aladaxónù family in Allada enter the temple of Têdo, or otherwise take part at his festivals.

A third version of this tale may also be summarised :

Once, in the early days, a male leopard emerged from a river, and, for a period of time, lay with one of the wives of the King of Adjâ. The King, who alone shared this secret, revealed it to his principal wife, herself childless. By spreading the news, this wife brought about opposition to the succession of these leopard children to the throne of Adjâ. The three brothers that had been born to the "wife of the leopard," killing their enemies, fled from their pursuing countrymen to Allada, where they established themselves in time as rulers over the autochthonous Aizônù. The three brothers, however, could not live harmoniously together, and the restless blood of their animal parent, lusting for conquest, brought about their separation after serious quarrelling. The hunter, Agasú, left with his followers to penetrate northwards, Adjaxutó remained at Allada, while Te Agbañlí, the third brother, went southward, his descendants eventually to rule over the region of which the present Porto Novo is the principal city. The supernatural leopard father showed greatest favor to Agasú, however, since, with the passing of the centuries, it was his descendants who came to rule ancient Dahomey, Adjâ, Allada, and many lesser indigenous kingdoms. Now whereas the father of Adjaxutó, Agasú and Te Agbañlí was a warrior and, true to his species, a lover of human blood, their mother was a peace-loving woman who had enjoined peaceful ways upon them. Being sons of their father, however, they observed their mother's proscription of warfare by a subterfuge; for, having conquered an enemy kingdom southwest of Allada, they commanded the people who lived there to live forever at peace, and in this to act as their agents.

Still another variant, which was recounted in the greatest secrecy, was vouchsafed to explain the origin and background of the royal sib :

Adjaxutó, Agasú, and Te Agbanlí were brothers, all born of the same mother. They conspired against the successor who had been named by their father, the King of Adjà, before his death, and after some bloodshed, found it expedient to flee the country for safety. As sons of a great King, they experienced no difficulty in gaining sway over the people of Allada and the adjacent kingdoms. There they remained as rulers until their ambitions, once more active, caused a schism, since the younger brothers had no taste for remaining in Allada while the oldest of the three enjoyed the kingship. Therefore, Agasú went to the north, and Te Agbanlí to the southeast, the first one penetrating to the region where Abomey is at present, the second to what is now Porto Novo. Their leaving Adjà had "something to do" with determining whether succession should go through the mother's family or through that of the father, a question that, in the olden days, used to give much trouble. However, with the formation of the great families, and as a result of the escapades of these brothers, it was ordained that the line must descend on the side of the father.

Though these stories fail to agree on several important points, they are in accord in general outline and intent, and give an understanding of the mythical founding of this important sib and the reasons for some of its *sú*.

II. *Óhwegbó Geyonù* (Quarrel-great-Ge-digging-people).—
"The people of the great quarrel, who dig graves like Ge makes his holes."

A difference of opinion existed as to the status of this relationship group. Some held that it constitutes a sib; while according to others the name here given is merely another designation for the royal sib, and still others maintained that though this group was recognized as a social entity, it was a sub-grouping of the royal sib. The fact that Agasú is its *tóhwiyo* indicates that this group is made up of descendants of that branch of the royal family for whom the *tóhwiyo* of first rank is Agasú, but who, for the reason given below, had become separated from the main branch. No differentiating taboos were specified.

Those who claimed for this group an independent sib status state that it is composed of princes; that its ancestors originally lived at Allada, but during one of the royal family quarrels a number of younger members left home; that the eldest among them took all the wealth of their father and mother and settled at a village called Agbotoga. When others saw that the members of this family continually quarrelled they called out, "Óhwegbó," that is, "justice."¹ The story relates

¹ The following quotation from Skertchly (p. 97) is not without interest at this point: "... Whe-gbo ... is memorable as the site of the great palaver between the three sons of the last king of Alladah. According to the heralds, the name

further how before the members of the present dynasty came to Hwəgbó, the people there did not know how to make graves for their dead, but threw the dead bodies into the bush. However, there was a parrot-like bird called *ge*, who knew how to make holes in the ground. The people were astonished that the Aladaxónù buried their dead in graves, and said, "They make holes like the *ge* bird," and hence called them Gəyónù. This, therefore, is said to be the derivation of the name of this group.

III. *Xwǎ Tɔlɔnù* (Horse-children Tɔlɔ-people),—"Child-
ren of the horse that emerged from the Tɔlɔ river."

Though the members of this sib are not related to the royal sib, they worship the same *təhwiyó*, some following Agasú, and some Adjaxutó. The origin of this sib is as follows:

A woman came to a river for water. As she stooped at the bank, a horse bounded from the river, and, overcoming her, lay with her. He then changed into a man, and told her she was to remain there by the river, where a son would be born to her; and he told her what to do and what not to do, that she might be delivered without danger to herself. Her own family, knowing nothing of what had happened to her, thought her lost. However, she lived with her husband at the place by the river until the time approached for him to die. He called to him the son who had been born to this woman and who was now grown, and told him what he must know—the food he could eat, and that which he must refrain from eating, what he must do or avoid doing to prosper, where the powers and aptitudes of the family lay, and what things held danger for them, and, finally, the son was instructed concerning the disposal of his father's remains. Three years after his father died, the skull and bones were exhumed and were put into a hole in the ground, and over it a mound was built. That is called the *aizǎ*. When the mother died, her bones were buried beside those of the horse, and that is why when they sacrifice to *aizǎ*, they give a male and a female of whatever animal is to be killed. The son born of their union is the *təhwiyó* of this family, and before his death he, in turn, called his children together and told them the things his father, the horse, had told him, that they might pass on to their children the family *sú*, the powers they possessed, the knowledge of the things that were dangerous for them, and the enterprises in which they would especially prosper.

of the village was Aikun (a kind of bean) before the conference, but that after several days had been spent in futile endeavours to settle the momentous question, one of the councillors, anxious to put an end to the Dahoman Tichborne case, cried out 'Whe' (no person is able to settle) 'gbo' (so great a palaver). This was held to be conclusive, and the speech became the name of the town according to the usual custom."

This tale is recounted as given; it will be noted that the explanation of the nature of the sib-*aizǫ* here differs from that to be given below when the making of an *aizǫ* is described. This is not the only point in the myth which presents difficulties, however, for the question at once arises in considering it why these people, whose *tshwiyǫ*, according to the tale, is the first offspring of the horse, give no name for this spirit, but ascribe the position to the royal *tshwiyǫ*. Perhaps two separate strains have gone into the founding of the royal family, one of which, because of political expediency, was suppressed; or perhaps the reason lies in the fact that this myth was not obtained from a member of the sib, but from one whose membership is in the royal sib. The myth concerning the nature of the *aizǫ* is of very special interest, even though, as will be later observed,¹ there is no unanimity of opinion on this matter.

IV. *Atoluvi Gbadjanu* (Atolu-children on-high-people)—
"Children of Atolu, who came from on high."

No translation was available for the word *Atolu*, and while the second word is correctly rendered, the fact that the *tshwiyǫ* of this sib is named Gbǎgidibagó would indicate that the element *gbadja* is perhaps a proper name. According to one explanation, a man and a woman came from the sky, and this pair comprise the *tshwiyǫ* of the sib, Gbǎgidi being the man, Gbagó, the woman. However, another version, while agreeing that the original ancestors of these people came from the sky, holds that the term *gbǎgidi* is the name of a place not far from Abomey, that it was there they appeared and their descendants are to be found today.

A brief abstract of the origin-myth of this sib is as follows:

One day long ago a heavy rain fell, and many people descended from the sky with the rain. When they arrived on earth there was nothing but bush. However, before their descent the *lokó* tree had appeared and it was down this tree that the people climbed to earth. The first man to descend was named Gbǎgidi and it was he who founded the family.

Some maintained that this sib has no *tshwiyǫ*, properly speaking, though they recognize the *lokó* as their most important ancestor and they are called "children of the *lokó*." The sacredness of the *lokó* tree has long been recognized in Dahomey, but though in addition to its being a pantheon member of the Sky cult it has important affiliations with the *tshwiyǫ* of many sibs, it is this sib for whom the *lokó* has

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 301-303.

primary importance. All agree that this sib is an ancient one, and that the descent from the sky of their ancestors occurred before Hwɛgbadja's predecessors pursued their conquering way north from Allada to Abomey. It is said that it was Hwɛgbadja who obliged the Atolovi to move north to the Maxi country, though a few members of the sib were left behind. Of this group one man must always take the name of Gbágidi. According to some, Gbágidi refused to remain in Abomey after his people had been banished to the north, even though he was a friend of Hwɛgbadja. The move came suddenly, during the night, and the next day, when Hwɛgbadja asked for Gbágidi, he could not be found. When those who searched for him discovered him, he was well established in his new home, and Hwɛgbadja consented to his remaining there. Ever since that day, a man named Gbágidi has been chief of Savalu, but he comes to Abomey to attend the annual ceremonies held at the *lokó* tree called Agomáyê ("earth-I-come"), on the road between Abomey and Zadu, down which the founders of this sib are believed to have descended to earth.

V. *Lekévi Dogonù* (Leké-children hole-near-people)—
"Children of the hen, who came from a hole."

Leké was explained as the cry of a hen when it lays an egg. Those who named this sib could give no information concerning its *tshwiyó* or its *sú*.

VI. *Agblomenù* (Agblo-place-people)—*"People of the place of Agblò."*

The name of this sib was explained by the one who first spoke of it as, "They came out of a hole; they are people who live in a certain place." It was denied, however, by others, that this name was that of a sib; it merely designated a quarter in the city of Abomey, where two groups, *Agblome leví*, and the *Agblome daxo* reside. These latter persons, however, added that the *lokó* tree is the *tshwiyó* of both these groups, which would seem to indicate that the quarter takes its name from the common term in the names of two subsidiary sibs, who together are the "*Agblome* people."

In any event, the origin myth of this people as given may be presented here:

One day in early times, during a heavy rain, a great cloud of smoke suddenly arose from the earth. In those times, the region of Abomey was a great forest, and had no inhabitants. The cloud of smoke issued from the very center of this forest. When the smoke cleared, a man, followed by a woman, were visible. Each of them carried a sack at his side containing okra seeds. On the next day there was another heavy

rain, and again smoke arose. This time, sixty-six people appeared, thirty-six women and thirty men. These people began to cut the forest and clear the earth so that it might nourish human beings. They cultivated the land and planted the okra seeds which they had brought.

The first man to appear was called Agblô, and he mated with the woman who accompanied him, and the people who followed them also mated and had offspring, and their descendants peopled the quarter. Agblô and his wife eventually died, he in the morning, and she the same afternoon. The others who were left mourned the loss of the two who, they said, had founded their line. To the bodies of these founders, then, the corpse of a ram which had been sacrificed to their spirits was added, and with this ram they were buried in the hole in the earth from whence they had issued. Thus it is said that the people of this sib have no *tshwiyô* and no *aiẓâ*, but that the hole from which their ancestors issued represents the power of both of these for them.¹

When the founders of the line were buried, and the hole in the earth from which they had come was filled in, these people had no gods to worship. Some time later, a man called Cheyí was digging a well. When he reached a depth of twelve or fourteen meters, he found he had uncovered a great road, along which many people were passing. He started along this road, but soon he met a woman, who asked him why he had come. He replied that he was digging a well and had happened on this highway. He was told that the place where he had dug was sacred to the Earth and that he must be brought before the ruler of this place. Cheyí was thereupon taken to a temple where, though he saw no one, he could hear a voice, which announced to him that he was now in the house of Sagbatá,² and that it was Sagbatá himself who had caused him to choose the spot he had selected for his well, so that he might come to this country, learn how to worship the Earth gods, and take this knowledge back to his own people. Cheyí was thereupon ordered to return to his home, to close the hole and build a temple for Sagbatá over it. Another place not far from this was designated, and here, he was informed, he must raise another temple for Mawú and Lísa, the gods of the Sky. Finally, he was instructed to tell all his people to worship these three deities as their *tshwiyô*. He was told how Sagbatá "eats" the male goat, Lísa the female goat, and Mawú the ram, and was taught the cult of these three gods.

When Cheyí emerged from the earth, he closed the excavation he had made as he had been instructed. He built the three temples, and brought before him all the people of the village to inform them of what he had seen and heard. In accordance with the instructions given him the first ceremony was held. The first ram and goat sacrificed to

¹ There is no inconsistency between this statement and that of others that the *lokó* is the *tshwiyô* of this sib, for the *lokó* tree is closely associated with the worship of the royal sib, and might well have been imposed on an indigenous group who had no previous cult of the *tshwiyô*, which, incidentally, is said to have come from the Xagbonutó people, i.e., the Porto Novian group, when the plateau of Abomey was conquered by the Dahomean kings.

² Sagbatá is the name of the Earth pantheon.

Mawú and Lísá were accepted; a heavy rain fell, thunder was heard, and in an instant the animals disappeared. The goat for Saghatá also disappeared, for when it was put in the temple, the earth opened and swallowed it. Yet, though Cheyí had been told what animals to sacrifice, he had not been instructed in the details of worship of the deities to whom he had erected temples. It is for this reason that, after a time, a man named Agámú appeared out of an opening in the earth, spent sixteen days with Cheyí teaching him how to "establish" the gods and how to sprinkle their altars with the blood of the animals sacrificed to them. Thus it was Cheyí who began the cults of the Great Gods, and it was he who became the first high-priest of the three pantheons. But one day, when he had grown old, the earth opened and he disappeared.

It is tabooed to the members of the sib to observe the rituals of the ancestral cult, and none of them may be a priest of this cult. It is also forbidden to a person of another sib, even though a prince, to establish his house in the quarter inhabited by the members of this sib, and it is for this reason that the Agblomenù quarter of Abomey is not as densely populated as other quarters. While a man belonging to this group may take a woman of another sib as an *akwénúsi* wife,¹ such a woman may not inherit any of the property of her husband, and she is often allowed to return to her own home shortly after his death. It is also said that if the small son of an *akwénúsi* wife is heir to an Agblomenù man, the mother must leave, since if she does not go, she, as a member of another sib, may exert undue influence over her son. It is also customary for men who marry women of this sib to perform a ceremony called *ségbwegba*. The night before the wedding the family furnish a sheep, a chicken, and other things known only to sib-members and forbidden to be divulged. The fiancé provides drinks and money to spend for the family of his bride. The sheep is killed and there is singing and dancing and much gift-giving until the animal, stewed with leaves, is ready to be eaten. While all partake of this stew it is particularly important for the woman who is to be married to eat of the mutton that she may bear children.

VII. *Gbadjá Soménù.*

The origin myth of this sib is as follows:

A man and a woman descended from the sky to the district of Somé in Adjà, and this was the first family founded on the earth. They came bearing a long wand, wearing blouses that were much longer than those ordinarily worn today, and carrying a calabash. It not only

¹ See below, pp. 302ff., for an explanation of this designation.

rained the day they came from the sky, but it continued to rain for seventeen days thereafter. During this entire time they uttered no word, except to cry out the name of the being who had sent them, calling, "Sëgbó, Sëgbó, Sëgbó...!" On the seventh day of rain, another man and woman descended from the sky, and these wore the white beads which are known even today as *lísadjè*, "beads of Lísá." These people began to teach the worship of Mawú and Lísá, the Great Gods of the Sky, and it is said that the first temple they raised in honor of the cult they brought still exists in Adjá. When the day came on which they were to offer sacrifices to Mawú and Lísá it rained once more, and with the rain still more beings came from the sky to aid them. But as soon as the ceremony was over, these went back to their abode from which they had descended.

After this ceremony had been carried out three or four times the second pair also returned to the sky, leaving their beads behind them. Before they departed, however, they left a daughter on earth, with the original couple who had completed the establishment of a temple for Mawú, one for Lísá, one for Gú, and a fourth for Agê.¹ For Mawú they killed a ram, for Lísá a white goat and a white chicken, to Gú was sacrificed a white cock and to Agê a dog, and since that time the sacrificial animals have been the same, for it is they who taught the cult of Mawú to man.

Later the woman gave birth to two children, the first a son, and the second a daughter. With each child at birth came a small wand held in the hand and, as the child grew, this wand grew. The children carried their wands with them everywhere, and they were never lost. Seven years after the birth of their children the parents returned to the sky whence they had come, and now each of the children in turn explained the teachings of the cult to which they were vowed. Since their teachings were good, the worship of the Sky gods spread everywhere in Dahomey.

When the original couple descended from the sky they were accompanied by a chameleon, who went everywhere with them, as a dog goes about with his master. The chameleon, who always walked before them, was sent by Lísá to protect them, because it was realized that when they taught the doctrines of Mawú and Lísá there would always be those who would refuse to receive their teaching, and who would conspire against them. But with the chameleon in front, when an enemy who was intent on attack was about to strike them from behind, they could see their assailants reflected in the smooth skin of the chameleon, and be on guard, for the body of the chameleon, like that of Lísá, is as smooth as a mirror. This is why the chameleon is the animal sacred to the god Lísá.

It is said that the members of this sib are not prosperous in worldly affairs, since they are given to spiritual rather than material concerns, and bend their energies only on returning to the sky, once their children

¹ The four principal gods of the Sky pantheon. See below, vol. ii, pp. 105-107.

are born into the world. This sib has no other aim than to worship Mawú and Lísá, and, therefore, when the original founders realized that their teachings were understood by man, they left on earth only a boy and a girl, and with all who had descended with them from the sky, ascended to their original habitat. The Guduví Adjálènú (Sib VIII), who are also devoted to the cult of the Sky gods, are related to this sib, since, according to some, this other sib is descended from the daughter of the original pair who re-ascended to the heavens as told in the origin myth of the Gbadjá Soménù. Like this other sib, and like the Agblomenù (Sib VI), the people deify none of their ancestors, for they declare that man does not worship man. Similarly they do not pierce their ears, explaining that were they to do this they would not hear the commands of their deity, inasmuch as what was said would "enter one hole and go out the other." Furthermore, none of the members of this sib may be cicatrized, for they say that man cannot improve upon the creation of the gods.

VIII. *Guduví Adjálènú* (Gudu-children Adjálè-people)—
"Children of Gudu, the people of Adjá."

The *tshwíyó* of this sib is not the being designated in the sib-name, for some of the members take Dá and others Gbosíkpá. It was stated that there are three sub-sibs contained within this large group, but it was possible neither to obtain their names nor why they should be recognized as such. These people deify none of their ancestors, but since they brought the worship of Mawú-Lísá and their pantheon to Abomey, they regard these as their forbears and thus the deification of their more immediate ancestors is not necessary.¹ It was also stated that the Guduví Adjálènú inherit from their mothers, but no confirmation of this statement could be obtained. It is forbidden to members of this family to pierce the lobes of the ear.

¹ See the myth of the introduction of the worship of the *vodú* into Dahomey, as given below, vol. ii, pp. 103-104. This may also account for the sib-name given these people.

Chapter X

THE SIB ORGANISATION OF DAHOMEY (*Continued*)

Continuing with the catalogue of sibs, the ninth in the list is reached :

IX. *Akôsuvi Madjanù* (Akôsu-sons not-rain-people)—
“*The sons of Akôsu, who come from a place where it does not rain.*”

The members of this sib are held to have come from a great distance, and are believed to be descendants of an individual named Akôsu. Where they first made their home there was no rain, and this is the reason for the name by which their sib is known. These people do not kill the pigeon and regard themselves as related to the calabash. A calabash, therefore, must never be burned in the presence of a sib-member. As it was not possible to obtain the origin story of this sib from a member of it, the mythical reasons for these *sù* cannot be given.

The *tshwiyô*, which this sib shares with a number of others, is Gbosikpɔ. Other than the fact that this *tshwiyô* came from the north, no details as to its nature can be given. The members of this sib are believed to be capable and trustworthy, and to have given Dahomey many of its important chiefs. According to some, members of this sib have peopled all of Africa—“You will even find them on the Ivory Coast, but there they have another name.”

X. *Gbosikpɔvi Dokonù* (Children-of-Gbosikpɔ, hole-near-people)—“*Children of Gbosikpɔ, people who live near a hole.*”
Ananɔvi Dokonù (earth-deity-children hole-near-people)—
“*Children of the Earth-gods, people who live near a hole.*”

Both of the above names were given for this sib, and, since descent groups may have more than one designation, both may perhaps be valid. However, one informant who gave the first name stated that he had never heard the second one, and insisted that the translation of the word *ananɔvi*—“children of the Earth deities”—was entirely unfamiliar to him, nor did he believe that this sib has any special connection with the gods of the Earth pantheon. The *tshwiyô* which this sib worships, as is evident from the first sib-name given above, is Gbosikpɔ. However, other than the fact that these people represent

an indigenous line that lived not far from Abomey before Dahomey was conquered by the Aladaxónù dynasty, no particulars of the mythological origin of this sib were to be had.

XI. *Djaví Gbangbwénù*¹ (Dja-children pride-people)—
"The proud people who are children of Dja."

This sib derives its name from a mythical occurrence which happened in the course of their history. *Dja* is a dish prepared for hunters, composed of water, millet, and palm-nuts, and it is a *sù* that a woman married to a person of this sib must eat of this dish when she bears a child. The tale is as follows:

Long ago, a woman who was married to a man of this sib gave birth while her husband was away hunting. Her co-wives did nothing to help her and, to provide for herself, she put some millet and palm-nuts in water, and nourished herself on this, being unable to prepare better food in her condition. When her husband returned he found that both his child and its mother were in good health, and therefore he ordered that from that day all the women of his sib, and those who were married to his descendants should, when they bore children, eat nothing but the dish called *dja* for the first three days after birth.

The members of this sib are regarded as related to the Gbosíkpáví, who share with them the observance of this injunction. Gbosíkpá is the second *tòhwíyó* of this sib, the principal one being Gbangbwe.

XII. *Golónuví Tofonù* (Goló-people-children Tofó-people)—
"Children of Goló; people who came from the Tofó river."

This sib, which was the subject of extended discussion, was stated by some to be the same as another, first given under the name of *Gelenùví Golonù*. In the original rendition, the first word was not translated, the second being given as "closed people," but it was held that the first word was wrongly rendered and that the second was the same as the *Golónuví* in the title by which this sib is designated here. Two *tòhwíyó* were first given for this sib in the original listing, these being Dā and Gbosíkpá; however, those who objected to the first name also stated that this sib had only one *tòhwíyó*, Gbosíkpá.

The home of the sib is said originally to have been the Tofó region, where a sacred river flows. One day this Tofó river overflowed its banks and the resulting flood wreaked great havoc on the surrounding country. When the water receded, a man and a woman were left in the river-bed, and it is from the union of these two that the members of this sib claim descent.

¹ This sib was also designated by the name of *Djaví Gbangbwexónù*.

Though reports of the special behavior of the members of this sib were as conflicting as the names given it, it was unanimously held that too close contact with its members is dangerous, though it was evident that, by this very token, the Dahomeans are fascinated by the customs of this group. Thus it is said that one must have temerity to marry a member of this sib, because it is held that if one of these girls after sleeping with a man rises before he does, the man will die. It is understandable, therefore, why the same person stated that there is a great amount of inbreeding within this sib. Another version of this *sú* stated that if a person marries a woman of this group, he must never sleep with her in a room with a closed door, but the door must be left open, this account agreeing with the preceding one, however, in holding that a woman must not get up before the man or his death will result. It was also said that the women of this sib are never virgins when they marry, because the man who first has sex contact with a girl of this sib is doomed to death. Hence, it is customary for a woman of the sib to go on a long journey before marriage and take a man who does not know her affiliation for a casual first intercourse.

It was stated that this folk and the male goat belong to the same family, and, in consequence, these people do not eat the flesh of the goat. The myth which explains the identity of the pair who founded the sib, however, was not obtained.

XIII. *Djisóvi Sîmenù* (Sky-thunder-children water-inside-people)—“*The children of Thunder, who live in the water.*”

This sib takes its origin from a region near the Weme river in eastern Dahomey, where, it is said, an entire village descended from the sky. The principal *tshwiyó* is Gbosikpɔ, though Misá and Djísô, a character to be cited later when the Thunder pantheon is discussed, are worshipped as subsidiary *tshwiyó*.

XIV. *Akílívi Sodônù* (Akílí-children [gnu-hole-people])—“*Children of Akílí, who came from the descendants of the gnu.*”

The *tshwiyó* of the people of this sib, according to one informant, is Gbosikpɔ, though another claimed for it Dąngbé Hwéda. All agree that these siblings must abstain from eating the flesh of the gnu, from which they claim descent; in addition, a number of other *sú* which they must observe were recorded. One person, a member of this sib, observed that he does not eat the meat of the ram, “because it is our *aizá*,” though he was unwilling to tell the myth which validated this practice for him. The members of this sib do not eat the meat

of the large rat that lives in burrows in the forest, because it is regarded by them as a subsidiary *tshwiyó*, and should one of them walk over the blood of this animal, he would become ill. Similarly, they do not eat the cat. In early days the members of this sib were blind, and the cat, who then spoke like men speak, led them to the snake who opened their eyes. Furthermore, they do not eat a wild plant named *gbuló*, described as resembling the pepper-plant. In early times they fed exclusively on this plant, but, after they began to worship the *dangbe* serpent, they began to sicken and die. This continued until finally they were enjoined from eating the *gbuló*, which they then learned had been the cause of these deaths. It is believed that should the wife of a member of this sib be unfaithful to her husband, and not confess her misdeed, the man will die. After she had confessed, however, her husband may take leaves and wash his feet in the water of the lagoon near Peda, and then, should he so desire, safely possess his wife once more.

XV. *Ayinóvi Agbōwotó* (earth-possessor-children ram-kill-he-who)—“*Children who possess the earth; those who killed the ram.*”

The name of this sib suggests a relationship between them and those of the sib which follows in this list; indeed, it was suggested that this sib represents one sprung from the brother of the founder of the *Ayinóvi Dokwénù*. These people worship two *tshwiyó*, the one *Atísù*, and the other *Gbosíkpá*; according to one informant, they were the first sib to have had an *aizá*. This fact might explain why they are called “the people who killed the ram,” since *Aizá* “eats” no meat other than mutton.

XVI. *Ayinóvi Dokwénù* (earth-possessor-children hole-near-people)—“*Children who possess the earth; people who live near a hole.*”

Other than the name of this sib, and the fact that their *tshwiyó* is named *Atísù*, no information concerning it could be obtained.

XVII. *Adjévi Xqntónù* (*Adjà*-children blood-river-people)—“*The children of Adjá; people of the river of blood.*”

This sib has two *tshwiyó*, one named *Misá Gbogbwénù*, the other the same *Atísù* who was given as *tshwiyó* of the two preceding sibs in this list. No details as to the mythological history or *sú* of this sib were to be had.

XVIII. *Agénuvi Hwelínù* (hillock-people-children sun-route-people)—“*Children of a high place, people of the route of the sun.*”

According to Dahomean belief, the name of this sib indicates an eastern provenience. No origin myth was obtainable, and other than

the fact that it is tabooed to them to have anyone comment on the shining of the sun while rain is falling, since the penalty for a sib-member should anyone do this is death, none of their *sú* could be ascertained. The name of their *tshwiyó* was said to be Dã., but the nature and history of this being was not described.

XIX. *Ayatóví Gaménù* (Ayato's-children iron-within-people)—*"The children of the forger, who live amidst the iron."*

As is indicated by its name, this sib is that of the iron workers. Another name for these people is:

<i>Màtɔ</i>	<i>mátɔ</i>	<i>gbo</i>	<i>zù</i>	<i>chíyá</i>	<i>akódò</i>	<i>dogblème</i>
not-enter	not-enter	and	anvil	resounds	family-and	always-seated
<i>gbó xò</i>	<i>afòtɔ</i>	<i>akò</i>	<i>sɔ</i>	<i>zù</i>	<i>kpè</i>	<i>gbó sò</i>
and cost	dear	family	take	anvil	small	and take
						<i>ɔkɔ</i>
						riches.

"Though no one has entered the forge, the anvil resounds; though the family are always seated, their work is dear; the family use small anvils, but receive great riches."

In this name is included something of the mythological history of the sib, and its reputation for riches, for this is said to be the richest of sibs. The first portion of the name arises from the tradition that the earliest member of this sib established a forge, putting the hammer and anvil there. In the early days when there was more magic than today, even though the owner was not in his forge, the hammer could be heard striking. Thus the saying—"The anvil resounds, though no one has entered the forge."

The founder of the sib was named Tógbó Dəsú, who emerged from a river carrying an anvil, a hoe, and a knife. He worked alone with his tools, beside the river from which he had come. One day, the hoe which he had brought and was always with him changed into a man who called himself Adjàɛní ("hoe-of-Adjà"). After a time Tógbó Dəsú died. Adjàɛní continued to be an iron-worker, and used the tools his father had left him for his work. He had a child named Hwéyù, and, after this child was born Adjàɛní died. It is said that Hwéyù had no mother and on the death of Adjàɛní, he left Adjà and established himself at Hwemé Djigbé, a place near Zado, not far from Abomey. Tógbó Dəsú, under his name of Măsê, became the principal *tshwiyó* of this sib. However, the deity which this sib particularly worships is Gú, the god of iron, something that is not strange when it is considered that this sib comprises the iron-workers. Besides Măsê, the

principal *tshwiyô*, there are three subsidiary ones, named Agade-*γansû*, Siligbô, and Hwesiyo.

There are numerous *sû* which the members of this sib observe, some of these being that they do not eat the wild lettuce called *nyatôtô*, and do not work on Tuesday, because this day is sacred to Gû. The following tale explains why they do not eat the flesh of the ram:

After Hwéyû had established himself at Hwamé Djigbé, his descendants did not remain there permanently, but settled in Akpé (Allada) under a sib-head whose name was Adamú. One day Adamú, tired from the work he had been doing, seated himself under a tree to rest. He soon began to doze, and as he sat with his back propped against the trunk of the tree, his head nodded from time to time. Just at this time a large ram passed by, and, seeing the motion of Adamú's head, believed that he was being challenged. Lowering his own head in turn, he charged the sleeping man. The force of the blow delivered by the ram killed Adamú, and therefore since that time his descendants not only do not eat the flesh of the ram, but may never have a ram in their compounds.

XX. *Daggbévi Hwedánû* (serpent-children Peda-people)—
"Children of the serpent who came from Peda."

The members of this sib are today found principally in the region of Whydah. Their *tshwiyô* is the *daggbé* serpent, the reason for this being given in the following myth:

When Mawú peopled the world, a man, his mother, and his sister were brought to Peda. The name of this man was Gbenu, that of his sister Gudjo. These three people had no food to eat, nor any money with which to buy food, so that when they saw a *daggbé* serpent in their house, they killed it, for they did not know that the people of that country did not harm the *daggbé*. After a time, Gudjo became pregnant. While she was experiencing violent labor pains, a monkey called Zinhu came to the house of these people; this monkey is a *vodu*—a god—sacred to twins. He said, "No doubt you did something wrong, otherwise your child would come." But the girl said, "I have done nothing wrong." "All the worse for you, then, for had you confessed to me, I would have made your child come." Angered, the monkey started to leave, when the girl called after him, "Come back, come back! Before I became pregnant, I killed a *daggbé*." Now, in these early days, the monkeys were the guardians of the *daggbé* serpents, and if one of them were killed, it was they who brought the body home and gave it proper burial. So when Gudjo confessed, the monkey said, "Show me the place where you are keeping him." The body had already decomposed, but the bones were still there. The monkey took these bones, and gave them decent burial. When he

had done this, he asked for two chickens. The woman was still in labor, but after the chickens had been killed at the grave of the *dqygbé*, the monkey said to the girl, "Now your child will be born." No sooner had he said this, than the child was born. Since *Dqygbé* had done this to these people, they made a small house over the place where the serpent had been buried, and began to worship *Dqygbé*, so that today, *Dqygbé* is the *tshwiyó* of their descendants.

This sib assumes special ethnological importance because of the fact that the worship of the *dqygbé* has been so strongly emphasized in the literature on the religion of West Africa, particularly when the so-called "serpent cult" has been under discussion. Yet, in point of fact the *dqygbé* holds its place in coastal Dahomey because it is the *tshwiyó* of the powerful royal sib of the old Kingdom of Peda, something which would account for the many rites that have been observed but not explained by the early travellers, and which have found uncritical repetition in the literature. It should be noted that this specialized worship of the *tshwiyó*, whose cult spread as he became a public deity, has but little in common with that of the spirit named *Dq*, which will be explained later.¹ One aspect of the cult of *dqygbé* that has been emphasized by those who have written of it, and which has impressed them as sensational, is that it is enjoined upon members of this sib to exhume the crania of their dead and to employ these crania instead of the ordinary metal standards as altars to receive the offerings given the ancestors. Another equally stressed phenomenon in its worship is that the devotees, particularly the women, indulged their privileges of sexual exuberance as offspring of a royal totem during the annual festivities for *dqygbé*.

XXI. *Agɛ Gbetovɛ Yálinù* (*Agɛ* hunter-children poor-people)—"*Children of Agɛ, the hunter, who are poor people.*"

These people inhabit the quarter of Abomey known as *Djená*, and the name of their *tshwiyó* is *Adídà*. The exact title of the sib was disputed by two informants, neither of whom, however, was a member of it. One of these stated that the name of *Agɛ* should not be included in the sib designation, but that these people should merely be called "*Children of a hunter, who are poor.*"

XXII. *Wasanù* (make-sell-people)—"*The people who are sellers of goods.*"

As in the case of the preceding sib, there is a difference of opinion as to the translation of the name of these folk, and in the light of the

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 245 ff.

two versions that were given, it is possible that here one is dealing with a case of folk etymology. The principal locale of this sib is Bohicon, the commercial village which serves the city of Abomey, thus giving present-day point to the translation that has been rendered, namely, that these are the folk who are particularly adept at commerce. However, it is maintained that the word *wàsà* is an archaic term for "horse," and this is given some force by the fact that the second in the list of three *tshwiyó* of this sib bears the name *Wàsà*. The members of this sib are kin of the horse, hence, they neither ride these animals nor eat of their flesh. Their three *tshwiyó* are *Azúwε*, *Wàsà*, and *Aligbónó*, who is related to *Adjaxutó*.

XXIII. *Axwanqvi Kadjanù* (war-commander-children Kadjà-people)—"*Children of the war-commander, the people who live in Kadja.*"

The members of this sib have their residence in the northern part of the territory of the old Dahomean kingdom, near Savalu. More than the name of their *tshwiyó*, *Maṅḷa Xosúdjàgò*, could not be obtained.

XXIV. *Adąṅdóvi Xezɛnù* (Bravery-hole-children bird-fly-people)—"*Brave children living in a hole, who, when seen by the bird, caused it to fly away.*"

The *tshwiyó* of this sib is named *Adąṅdò*, and hence the translation of the first word of the sib-name might also be "Children of *Adąṅdò*." The bird referred to is the *xwensuvo*, which builds a spherical nest that is suspended from a branch of a tree. The members of this sib regard themselves as relatives of the *xwensuvo*, and refrain from eating it. One of their *sú* is that when a child is born to any member of the sib, its parents and relatives must make a sacrifice, and then bury the sacrificed animal in a hole in the bush.

XXV. *Ayanavi Mmulanù* (pig-children stubborn-people)
—"*The stubborn descendants of the pig.*"

The members of this sib worship as their *tshwiyó* a being named *Mmula*, according to one account, though according to others, either *Akílí* or *Nyágε* is the supernatural head of their group. These folk eat the pig and sell its meat in the markets, though it is not permitted to them to hear the word *ɣɔ*, which designates the supernatural parent of their founder. In common speech, therefore, the word for "pig" has become *ąɣɔ*, since it is felt that the prefixing of an "a" before the word is sufficient to prevent any violation of the *sú*. Though the word *mmula* was first given the translation "stubborn," and though

stubbornness is supposed to be a characteristic both of the porker as he grubs for food and of the people of this sib, it will be evident from the origin myth of the group that the translation of the second term of the sib name might perhaps as well be "*M'mula people*"—that is, those who came into being because of what happened in the forest of M'mula.

The myth is as follows:

In the early days there lived a woman whose name was Yú. She was very poor and, since neither her father nor mother was alive, she went into the bush to try and find food. There she had no companions except the pigs which she raised. Ill fortune pursued her, however, and all but one of the animals died. This male pig, her sole remaining companion, was cared for as tenderly as a child. He was always with her. One day, coming back tired from her field, she lay down on her mat to sleep, and the pig lay with her. When she awoke, she found that the animal beside her talked as a man talks. He told her that he had had connection with her, and that she might bear children.

After this she took care of the animal as she would of a husband, and eventually gave birth to three offspring. These creatures, two males and one female, were neither human nor porcine; for their bodies were those of human beings, and their heads like those of pigs.

About the time she gave birth to her children, a famine came upon the land. The rain did not fall, and the harvest did not come. The father of the children, being an animal, did not know how to hunt for food for his wife. They became more and more emaciated because they had nothing to eat, until finally the husband, saying, "In times of famine one must help oneself as best one can," determined to save his wife by allowing her to eat one of the children. So one of the males was killed, the meat prepared, and eaten. The couple lived until their children had grown to maturity, and died on the same day. Now the surviving male and female children of the pair mated, and again three children, two male and one female, were born. Although it was no longer a question of hunger, they followed the custom that their father had instituted, killing one of their offspring and eating it, saying, "To be happy in our marriage, it is necessary to have enough to eat."

After this, generation by generation, the offspring of the matings of the descendants of Yú and her pig-husband were slowly transformed, until the children became altogether human. Eventually, a sib-head named Gbōchí ordered his descendants no longer to kill one of their offspring, but instead, commanded that all mothers of this sib eat the meat of the pig on the day of parturition, and that all men of the family kill pigs and sell them, in order to be happy. It is for this reason that the members of this sib sell pork.

The name of the porker who was the ancestor of the family was Yá, and this is why the descendants are called Ayanavi.

The taboos and injunctions observed by the members of this sib are, as in other cases, dictated by the mythology of their sib. Thus, a member of this sib never digs in the earth to make the swish employed in building houses, for to do so it is necessary not only to dig the earth but to moisten it; since the father of the founder of the line was the pig, and the pig is found in places that are wet and dirty, his descendants avoid these acts out of respect for their forbear. They eat palm-nuts, which are regarded as the favorite food of the pig. A member of this sib must never tell anyone in derision or as a pleasantry that he has a projecting jaw, inasmuch as this would be calling to mind the snout of the pig. And finally, if a member of this sib is struck over the nose he becomes ill, in this showing his ancestry, since the pig also suffers from a blow on the snout.

XXVI. *Yandvi* (also named as *Aizd-agbo*).

The *tshwiyô* of this sib is named Nyáǵǵ, the tale which gives the reason for this being as follows:

One of the early members of this sib was a hunter. One day, while in the bush, he fired at a buffalo (*agbo*). His shot went true, for the animal fell, but it was not killed. The hunter aimed a second and a third time, and the third time the buffalo changed into a man, who, leaving the hunter behind, ran to the hunter's own house. Everyone there asked him where he had come from, but he made no reply. The hunter, however, did not return, though they looked everywhere for him. They fed the buffalo who had turned into a man every five days, until, one day, he said he wished to have a certain girl of the family for a wife. She was given to him, and he said, "I have married your daughter, and the name of her descendants will be Nyagénù." Then he disappeared. At the place he vanished, they planted a silk-cotton tree.

The members of this sib sell the meat of the pig, but do not eat it, since they "respect" the pig for the following reason:

In early times the region where the family lived suffered from drought, and though they hunted long for water, they were rapidly perishing for want of it. One day they saw a pig caked with mud, and asked him where he had found the water. He led them to a water hole, and this water saved their lives.

They do not eat the spotted antelope, or any other animal that is spotted as the *yandâ*¹ after which they are named is spotted. Similarly, they do not eat the black fruit of a wild plant called *jámâ*, for the reason given in the following tale:

¹ Jackal (?).

Once, in olden days, there was a great famine, and an old woman of the sib went out to hunt for food. Finding the fruit of the *fómà*, she prepared it, and, not having anything to eat with it, gave it as a single dish to her children. Because they had that alone to eat, they began to die out, until only two members of the sib remained, one a male and the other a female, from whom all the present members of the sib are descended. When the woman was pregnant, they consulted a diviner, who told them that their dead forbade them to eat the *fómà*. Therefore to this day, the *sú* is observed by their descendants.

In this sib, as in another reported above, should the wife of a member deceive him and the matter be ignored, he will die. For his own safety, he must send his wife away.

XXVII. *Dovi Kogbwénù* (word-children laugh-people)—
"Children of the word which causes laughter."

The members of this sib live in the Agoni region, and are known to be very obscene in their speech; hence it takes its name from a custom enjoined on all the men of the sib when they marry. The "word which causes laughter" is "*Hé! Asinó! Dewliwle!* — Hey! Mother-in-law! The sperm will catch you!" When betrothed, a man of this sib finds out the path along which his future mother-in-law habitually passes when she goes for water, and at some place along this path he builds a small shelter. As she passes he calls her with the cry given above, and, approaching her, he drops his cloth and exhibits his genital organs. The mother of his fiancée, who apparently is prepared for this encounter, knowing the sib laws of her future son-in-law, watches him and, as he advances toward her, she dances. Eventually he dances behind her, and in this position, has intercourse with her. The girl's mother returns home and tells her husband. Both are satisfied, for this means that the marriage is assured, since had the man of this sib not behaved in this way, he could not have married the girl.

No information as to the *tshwiyó* of this sib was obtained; indeed, one informant stated that this name was a special designation for sib VI, and that the custom described here characterizes the behavior of the *Atoluvi Gbadjínù*.

XXVIII. *Ìvì Djeganù* (Ò-children salt-under-people)—
"Children of the Ì (a salt) river, the people of Djéga."

The *tshwiyó* of this sib is called *Djéga*; another name for him is *Dóga*. When a child is born to a member, it is taken to a river on the

day of its birth so that it may "swim," for before a newly born child of this sib may be given the breast of its mother, a cord must be put about it and it must be thrown into the water. The members of this family eat salt, but they may not sell it.

XXIX. *Àdìvì Dàmènú* (toad-children serpent-people)—
"Children of the toad, people of the serpent."

This sib has two *tshwiyó*. The first is *Dá*, the serpent, the second the spirits of the abnormally born who are called *txxsu*. The connection between the *txxsu* and the toad is to be seen when it is stated that the *txxsu*, who are thought of as living in rivers, regard the toad as their messenger. The people of this sib not only refrain from eating toads, but will not even touch one. If a member sees a dead toad, he takes a thread from the cloth he wears and puts it on the body, thus symbolically giving it a burial cloth.

XXX. *Àyátívi Dákpánú* (drink-fall-children *Dákpa*-people)—
"Children of the sprayed drink, people of Dákpa."

This sib, like the preceding one, has two *tshwiyó*, the principal one being called variously *Ŋwányà* and *Alóù*, the second named *Dákpa*. The word *Àyátí* designates the action of spraying a charm with liquor held in the mouth, and it is said that in the early times a woman fell into a container which held strong drink, and, becoming pregnant from this contact, bore a son. Some hold that the son sprang from her mouth as drink comes from the mouth of one who sprays a sacred object with it. It is also said that the members of this sib are derived from a river called *Dákpa*; today, however, they are found everywhere in Dahomey, and are to be distinguished by the fact that whenever one of them is called upon to perform any duty, he utters the cry "*Dákpa!*"

XXXI. *Azimávi Xókónú* (peanut-leaf-children *Xóko*-people)—
"Children of the leaf of the peanut, who live in Xóko."

The name of the *tshwiyó* of this sib is *Misá*, a being described as one "who has no feet and rolls like a peanut." It is said that these people live north of Abomey in the Maxi territory, that they are principally hunters, and are expert in their knowledge of black magic. An account of their origin myth tells how their female ancestor raised peanuts on her farm, and how, one day, one of the peanuts spoke to this woman, changed into a man, and became the father of her children. A member of this sib may always be recognized by the roughness of his skin, which partakes of the character of the peanut shell.

XXXII. *Koló Zogbanù* (Koló fire-break-people)—“*The descendants of Koló, who came from fire in the mountain.*”

The origin myth of this sib explains their principal *sú*, which requires that when any member of the sib becomes mortally ill, he must be buried alive.¹

Many years ago a woman named Koló lived near a mountain. This woman, who lived alone, had great difficulty in wresting a living from the inhospitable earth of this arid country. One day as Koló walked toward the mountain, it opened and a man emerged from it. He asked her what she was doing so close to the mountain, and she replied that she had come to take her own life, for she had no one to care for her. He told her, however, to go to her farm and he would help her. Now when he spoke, fire came from his mouth, and as night by night he came to the woman to help her clear the bush where she lived, it was only necessary for him to speak to illuminate everything as though it were day. When the man for whom the mountain opened would come out to visit his wife, he brought Koló everything she needed—food, drink, and clothing. He continued to visit her, and eventually she became pregnant, giving birth to twins, a boy and a girl. When this occurred, the father left the mountain, thenceforth to remain with his wife and children.

One day some hunters who happened by saw the cleared fields, and coming closer, learned that people made their home in this little-inhabited region and prospered there. The hunters learned, too, from the woman and her children that this was the country of their ancestors, and that here they farmed for a living. News of their existence was bruited about, so that soon people of neighboring villages went there to buy their produce. In time others came to settle near them, and eventually the entire region became inhabited. The original family continued to prosper and to grow.

All this time, however, the man had never been heard to utter a word; for when anything was to be said, the woman spoke. This was because fire still issued from his mouth when he opened it, and he wished none of the neighbors to know this. One day the father fell ill, and his wife did not know any medicine to give him. The neighbors came to see him daily, to ask after his health, and to suggest remedies. But he could not make any reply to their questions. The neighbors, all undiscouraged by his silence, continued their frequent visits. This greatly troubled him, and his wife and children.

One night when they were alone he said to his wife that since life had become so difficult for him, it would be best if he returned once more to the mountain. However, he said that he would not do this, because if he disappeared in such a way, all who lived nearby would

¹ It is said that this injunction was carefully followed by these people until, in recent times, French rule has tended progressively to discourage carrying it out.

know that she had been mated with a supernatural being, and might taunt their children with this knowledge.

He therefore instructed her to bury him alive, in order to free him from an existence that had come to be intolerable, and her of much trouble. He told her to say that it was a *sú* of his people that when anyone fell ill and spoke no more, such a person must be buried alive. Thus it came about that in the morning when his neighbors brought medicine for him to drink, and he did not open his mouth to take it or to answer them, the woman said, "I know the *sú* of my husband. When those of his family who are ill speak no more, they are as dead. Now we must bury him." So they buried him, and this became a *sú* for his descendants.

This sib numbers relatively few persons; indeed, only two of its extended families remain at the present time. One of these lives in eastern Dahomey near Zagnanado, while the other is found in the north of Dahomey, near Savalu. It is said that not a single member of this sib is to be found in Abomey. When the members of this sib trade in the market, they sell only things that are treated by fire—cooked foods, such as balls of *akásà*, and dishes of cornmeal, and pottery which must be fired. In their villages, which are situated in hilly country (near "mountains") they nightly build roaring fires, because they find pleasure in fires, and in living close to mountains, where they can watch the smoke from their fires mounting to the sky. Their *tshwiyó* was variously named as Agoné and Adjágbè;¹ what they eat or refrain from eating could not be ascertained.

XXXIII. *Adikúwí Adjohwenû* (tree-children steal-quarter-people)—"*Children of Adikú, living in the quarter where thieving is done.*"

This sib takes as its principal *tshwiyó* Adikú, though there are members of it who, for reasons that could not be ascertained, take the brothers, Akílí and Gbosíkpɔ as joint *tshwiyó*. The association made by Dahomeans of the word *adikú* with *abikú* is to be noted. The *abikú* are regarded as forest spirits who send children into the world who are likewise called *abikú*. These are born into life merely to be withdrawn after a short visit to the human world, and later return again for a similar adventure, so that when all or several of the children born to a woman die in childhood, these are said to be *abikú* births.² That this connection exists in the minds of the Dahomeans between Adikú, the *tshwiyó* of this sib, and the *abikú* is strengthened by the principal *sú* of the sib, for when one of their children is buried, the

¹ This name is not to be confused with that of the god of the hunt, Adjagbé.

² See below, vol. ii, pp. 260–261.

members steal whatever they can. Nothing is safe from them, and in the olden days even human beings might be abducted and sold into slavery on such an occasion. In honor of their *tshwiyô* a certain kind of tree is planted in their houses and this also is mandatory for them. It is said that the members of this sib came originally from the north, in the territory of the Maxi.

XXXIV. *Tôkpóvi Alîngenû.*

There was some dispute about the translation of the name of this sib, the *tshwiyô* of which was not known to any of the informants who spoke of it. According to one version the translation should be "children of Tôkpó, people of the small black iron bell." However, another version states that the word *alînge* does not signify an iron bell, but is another word for dog. It was stated in both versions that the founder of this sib was a dog, and that the people who belong to it neither eat the flesh of the dog nor have dogs about their houses.

XXXV. *Qntevî Kpókênû.* (Qnte-children wood-near-people)— "Children of Qnte, who remain near the forest."

Avîzuyà is the *tshwiyô* of this sib. No details of its mythology, or of the *sû* observed by the members, were obtained.

XXXVI. *Gbenuvi Solinû.*

The *tshwiyô* of this sib is Sô, (a being not to be confused with the Sô of the Xevioso cult). No information regarding the taboos—indeed, not even a satisfactory translation of the sib-name—could be obtained.

XXXVII. *Agbôlo Djimenû.*

As is the case with the succeeding sibs, no translation of this sib-name was obtained. There are three *tshwiyô*, the first named Avagbô, the second Gbwesivà, and the third Djakpwéte.

XXXVIII. *Ypsivi Dónvû.*

The *tshwiyô* of this sib is a being named Dônô. This is an ancient powerful sib, originally of the Maxi country.

XXXIX. *Hwelenávi Tólinû.*

These "children of Hwéléná" take this being as their *tshwiyô*; he also bears the appellation Gbósi.

No discussion of the sibs of an African people can be considered complete without taking into account the question of whether or

not totemism is to be discerned in the organisation and functioning of these relationship groups. Much of the point of such a discussion must inevitably turn on the concept of what constitutes totemism. One of the most inclusive definitions is that given by Goldenweiser¹:

"One speaks of totemism when a tribe comprises a social organisation mostly of the clan or gentile pattern, as well as a peculiar form of supernaturalism, consisting in the most typical cases of certain attitudes toward species of animals or plants or classes of natural objects. In totemism the social organization and the supernaturalism are combined in a distinctive way...."

Other characteristics which he recognizes are that the members of a totemic group trace their descent or regard themselves in some other way related to the animal or bird or thing which is their totem, while both totem and totemite share physical or psychic traits; that the totem protects the totemite against danger; that he is represented in art, and figures as a sacred symbol at ceremonies; that the totem is taboo; that the totemic group is named after the totem; and that ceremonies are performed by the totemites to multiply the supply of the totem animal. In addition to these traits of totemism, Goldenweiser notes that the totem is rarely some particular animal or plant or thing, but it is rather the entire species or the class of objects that figures as a totem. Finally, the most distinctive aspect of totemism is that the members of a totemic group may not intermarry, and this fact establishes the interrelation of social organisation and supernaturalism which is mentioned in the definition given above.

If this concept of totemism be applied to our discussion of Dahomean sib organisation, it is evident that practically all of the criteria named by Goldenweiser are fulfilled in Dahomean custom. The only notable exception comprises the ceremonies performed by totemites to multiply the supply of the totem animal, a trait that is drawn from the somewhat specialized form which totemism takes in Australia. In all other respects, the entire totemic complex is found in Dahomey. It is true that the representations of the totem animal in art do not figure very extensively for any except the royal sib, whose totem, the leopard, is one of the most characteristic motifs of Dahomean modelling, carving, brass-work and appliqué cloth designs. But the manner in which the founders of the Dahomean sibs are conceived so completely fulfils Goldenweiser's specification for this criterion of totemism, that the Dahomean data may be used to dispute this writer's own discussion

¹ "Early Civilisation," p. 283.

of what he envisages to be the characteristics of African totemism. Thus he states that in Africa, "The gentile totemic name... is often absent." It has been seen to what extent this does not obtain for Dahomean sibs. Similarly, the statement that "the idea of descent from the totem is fairly rare," and that "instead a variety of stories are told among the different tribes to explain how the totems first made their appearance" does not apply except in a few instances to Dahomean concepts of the development of the sib. It would seem that the statement involves a *non sequitur*, since in Dahomey not only is descent from the totem common, but stories to explain how these totems made their first appearance are also often found.

However, a presentation of field data is not the place to do more than offer material on which theoretical ethnological discussions may be based; and inasmuch as the purpose of this volume is to present a description of the culture of Dahomey, it is sufficient to indicate that insofar as the discussion of the existence or non-existence of totemism is concerned, it is indisputably present, according to the broadest definition. Decidedly, there is little or no resemblance between the elaborate totemic rites of Australia which perpetuate the totem animal by assuring its propagation and thus allow the members of other totemic groups to obtain it as food, and what is found in Dahomean belief. Similarly, one finds little resemblance between any phase of Dahomean social and religious organisation, and the elaborate carvings of crests that mark the totemic organisation of the Indians of the northwest coast of North America. None the less, if a definition is employed that does not lean too heavily on the customs or the cult-practices of any one particular group; if this definition is based not alone upon outward manifestations, but equally, if not more importantly, upon the inner significance of the phenomenon to those who manifest it, it is evident that the Dahomean unilateral descent groups, each recognizing a supernatural being or animal or plant or thing as sib progenitor, and each possessing a distinctive name and special food taboos, must be regarded as valid examples of the social phenomenon called totemism.¹

¹ Certainly, the totemic nature of Dahomean sib organisation was clear to Le Herissé, who says (p. 372), "Le *tohoui*—que nous traduisons volontiers par totem."

Chapter XI

THE ANCESTRAL CULT: DEIFICATION OF THE ANCESTORS

The ancestral cult must be regarded as the focal point of Dahomean social organisation. In order that a sib and its component parts may exist and be perpetuated, the worship of its ancestors must be scrupulously carried out. One important aspect of this cult of the dead is to conclude the funeral ceremonies for all dead adults within three years after their death, in order that their souls may not be lost to the sib. Another is to see to the timely deification of the ancestors. For such ceremonies, cycles of ten years are the most prudent, but because of the spiritual dangers to sib members and the great expense entailed, it is rarely that many decades do not pass before this is achieved.

Yet all important as is this aspect of the ancestral cult, it should by no means be inferred that the Dahomean broods eternally upon death, the transitoriness of life on earth, and the fullness of life after death. He is, on the contrary, avid of life, and a lover of vitality and potency. Tales of the after-world describe the markets conducted by the dead, but there is no "dancing," there are no songs of derision to lighten tired moments, none of those pleasant interludes without which life would be dull indeed. The drive to assure security after death, which is behind the elaborate funeral rites to be described, is the choice between oblivion and continued existence in the altruistic rôle of jealous guardian of the welfare and greatness of a person's descendants. But it is this concept that gives the key to those aspects of the cult that impinge not upon death but upon life, for through the proper worship of the spirits of the sib members who are dead, men and women feel assured of a large measure of security in a world full of difficulties. Superimposed upon this concept, moreover, is the certainty that some day they will join the company of their ancestors, and becoming deified, will be worshipped by their descendants. In the following pages, then, the ceremonies which bring about such deification will be considered.

Before proceeding to this, however, a glance at the structure of the world of the dead, with special reference to the place of those who have died most recently, may be ventured.¹ When the funeral is considered, it will be seen how the soul of the one who has died must pass over three rivers and clamber up a mountain, to reach the valley where his own forbears exist. Once there, he takes his place as the lowliest of these, because the most recently arrived, sitting at their feet on a low stool, in accordance with a seating arrangement dictated by rank as established by priority of birth in the land of the living. Heading the group of his sib-mates, to which the newly arrived spirit has been directed according to the facial-cuts he bears, and enstooled as a reigning monarch on the highest seat of all, is the *tshwiyô*. Grouped about him are the other important figures in the hierarchy of sib dead; the associate *tshwiyô*, who, though not rulers themselves, take rank with or just after the "monarch" because of the various reasons explained in the sib mythologies, and Dambada Hwedo, the personification of the powerful unknown dead. Then, seated in the order of their birth come the deified dead of the sib, the *tvodv*. Among these are also to be found the numerous special spirits who, marked by some particular attribute, have passed through the womb of a woman, and, thus being members of the sib, are accorded special place in the ancestral rites. Here are found the spirits of the sib *txoxsu*, the abnormally born guardians of the portals of the world of the dead, as well as the spirits of twins and of the children born succeeding twins. However, the newly-dead sib-member is not entitled to his full place in this company until the proper ceremonies, carried out by those of his sib who survive him, deify him and bring him into the class of "sib gods," the *tvodv*.

The ceremony of deification may be considered in this instance as giving reason for the construction of a shrine for the ancestors at the principal center of a sib or of a collectivity. The importance of shrines of this character is indicated by their ubiquitousness, for, as was seen when such an elementary aspect of Dahomean life as housing was discussed, no compound is complete without a building where its ancestral dead are worshipped. Such a building is termed *déxoxò*, and here the *asê* for the dead, where the rituals in their honor are carried out, are to be found. For the purpose in hand, it may be

¹ A more detailed description of the world of the dead is given below, vol. ii, pp. 239ff.

assumed that a collectivity which has been established desires, after a time, to consecrate a temple to its ancestral spirits. As will be seen, this is not without danger to those in charge of the ceremony and, the Dahomean being human, it may be assumed with a high degree of probability that for a number of generations each succeeding head of the collectivity has postponed the performance of this obligation until indications have finally pointed in no uncertain terms to the urgency of its fulfillment on pain of extinction of the group. The psychology which lies behind the postponement of a sacred duty of this kind is explained by the fact that supernatural beings are deemed so much a part of life itself that the rules by which men live are unhesitatingly applied to gods, and there is no reluctance to deal with them as one does with living beings, as, for instance, by seeking to postpone a duty regarded as a trying one.

Once the head of a group of collectivities finally decides to take the risk of "establishing" his ancestors, he proceeds to inform his subordinates, and to collect the necessary ceremonial objects. This done, he calls the *dokpwégq*, and communicates to him his intention of "establishing" the family dead. The *dokpwégq* asks for the names of all the members of his group who have died, and each head of a collectivity gives the names of those under him, men, women, and children, from the ones who may have died two weeks or two months before, back to the very earliest dead of his group of compounds. Cauries are used to keep the count. The *dokpwégq* asks the chief to give him whatever is needed for the ceremony, and receives goats, pigeons, guinea fowl, ducks, *lobozé*—small pots—money, cloths, and many mats, to name only some of the things provided. The family and the *dokpwégq* call a diviner, who first throws his lots to ascertain the proper time for the ceremony, and then to find out where it is to be held. Custom demands that the place be somewhere in the bush, so that when the date and locale have been fixed, the *dokpwégq* calls out his *dokpwè* to clear a large space.

The *dokpwégq* takes with him the cauries used to count the number of the dead ancestors. Should the ceremony be one of deifying the more recent dead he will have, relatively speaking, only a few, but in a case such as that which we are considering, the number of souls to be "established" as *tvodu* may reach from several hundred to a thousand, despite the fact that in all the rites of deification, it is of primary importance that none of the ancestors be forgotten. The *dokpwégq* has been given a mat for every caury, and these mats are folded so

that each makes a "small house" which shelters its corresponding caury-shell. At the side of this aggregate of folded mats he makes a larger "house" for the *hwésì*, the women of the house—that is, the women of other sibs who, marrying into this one, have died in the houses of their husbands before they had children; for women who have borne children to their husbands are regarded as members of their husbands' sibs. Two other large "houses" are made at the side for those called *hōgbádḡ*, the aborted and stillborn children, one for the males and one for the females; the reason for grouping them in this fashion being that their sex was not ascertainable at birth. Still another larger "house" is erected for the souls of those, not members of this sib, who may come to see these ancestors deified—the *kutútó dèvò*, "the other dead." These "larger houses" are also made of mats. The *dokpwégḡ* now asks for the native lanterns—*zogbwé*—and places a lantern and a *lobozḡ*—a small pot—in every "house" containing a caury. When they come to the houses of the *hwésì* and *hōgbádḡ*, those who are distributing the lanterns and pots shut their eyes and place a handful of cauries into each of them. The number of cauries put in these two "houses" must never be counted, for the number of souls in each of these categories cannot be known.

In addition to all the mat "houses," two full-sized shelters of bamboo are constructed. One is very long, while the other is of more normal proportions. In the first of these full-sized houses the descendants of those ancestors who are to be deified—men, women and children—sleep for four nights, while the *dokpwégḡ* and the members of his *dokpwè* with their drums and rattles use the other large house. Morning, noon, and night, the men who are married to women of the group must bring food, not only for their wives, but to feed the entire family and the officiating *dokpwè*. This is because those who are engaged in any ceremonial for the dead, whether it be such a one as this, an ordinary ceremony of the ancestral cult, or a funeral, must not be forced to care for the customary needs of life.

At midnight of the day on which the family arrive at the place of the ceremony, the *dokpwégḡ* and ten or twelve principal members of the group of collectivities leave, taking with them a great number of small pots and many chicks, which may not be more than a few days old.¹

¹ It is of major importance that the chick be a very young one, for after it is a week old it is useless for this purpose, and if too old, the soul that has been summoned, enraged at being called when it has nothing by which to be replaced, would cause the death of the one who had been instrumental in disturbing it, or would seize upon the soul of a living sib-member.

They also must have quantities of corn-flour mixed with palm-oil, which is called *akútù*. They betake themselves to a "cross-road" where seven paths meet; there the *dokpwégq* has already placed certain leaves and other objects, known to him alone, for this esoteric knowledge is imparted only to the *dokpwégq* during their training. He has his long staff in his hand, and when the group arrives he draws a circle in the sand with this wand. While the members of the family-group stand some distance away, he remains alone within the circle he has drawn, having with him the chicks, the maize mixed with palm-oil, and the pots that have been brought, and with these he performs a secret ceremony. Were this ceremony to be omitted, the souls of the dead would not be able to find their way to this world when summoned to come, so that they would wander, forever lost.¹

The *dokpwégq*, calling the family head, tells him to summon the heads of collectivities one at a time. Lamps are lighted, and for this purpose straw of the type named *zowí*, with which houses are thatched, must be employed. The *dokpwégq* and the chief of the group of collectivities now instruct each head of a collectivity in turn, as he comes to them, to name all the dead in the compounds under his charge. The *dokpwégq*, who wears a cloth which is specially sacred, takes a small pot and a little chick, puts some of the mixture of corn-meal and palm-oil into the pot, and stepping on a special magical charm which he has placed on the ground in front of him, leans toward the head of the first collectivity represented and asks in a whisper, "Who was the first of your collectivity to die?" As the reply is given, the *dokpwégq* whistles the name.² The sound is very clear and, it is said, can be heard in the silence of the night several hundred feet away. The *dokpwégq* calls sixteen times for each one of the dead, and as he whistles, he holds the small pot open on his outstretched hand. The sixteenth time, however, he throws the chick inside the *lobozé*, closing it immediately with his hand, since the chick acts as a substitute soul for the one summoned. The chief of the group of collectivities stands nearby holding many cloths, and when the *dokpwégq* has covered the opening of the pot containing the chick with his hand, he presents it, covered, to the head of the family group who swathes it at once with

¹ It is a commentary on the distinction drawn between the ancestral cult and other phases of religious life that a person who is a member of a cult-group, and thus a worshipper of one of the Great Gods, must never witness this portion of the rite.

² The tonal character of Fq makes possible the approximation of the spoken word by the tones of the whistle.

a cloth. The *dokpwégq̃* does not speak again, but when the first pot has a soul safely inside it, the chief of the first collectivity gives the name of the second person who has died in his group of houses, continuing this until, name by name, he has accounted for all the dead of his collectivity. The head of the second collectivity is then called, and the process is repeated until all the dead of the group of collectivities have been named. The pots are grouped by collectivities, but the sexes are separated. When all the known dead have been called, the *dokpwégq̃* takes three pots and whistles for the *hwésti*; he follows this by three for the *hǝgbádq̃*, and finally consecrates three for the *kutútó devò*. For these dead he calls, "*Hwésti-é-é-é-é*," whistling his call. Only older men may be present when such a rite takes place: "A young man of twenty-five could not be there. The dead talk on such a day, and many things happen."

When the *dokpwégq̃* has finished calling the souls of the individual dead, he summons the principal members of the group who have been standing at a distance, and they bring forty-one more chicks. The *dokpwégq̃* kills these, tearing them to pieces, and throwing the meat among the groups of small pots. At this time, he instructs each chief of a collectivity to "take his dead," and the *lobozǝ* are transported to the accompaniment of songs sung by three of the *akovi*, the women of the sib in whose care are the rituals for the ancestors. The *dokpwégq̃* and his followers, and all the sib members give cauries, *akútù*, palm-oil and other gifts to welcome their dead. In each small mat "house" is put the proper pot containing the soul that has been called to it, while more of the songs for the dead, called *akovixq̃*, are sung by the old women. A lamp stands in front of each of these small mat shelters, and these lights must burn day and night.

The following morning the *dokpwégq̃* and the head of the family group decree that a chief of those who drum for the dead, called *chí yò dō hǝ*, ("dead make-embark canoe") be summoned. When he arrives, he is given seven white cloths, seven white chickens and seven francs fifty centimes. Early that afternoon he brings his funerary drums, called *velà à xǝq̃*, to the place where the family are encamped, where resin [*kálálé*] is rubbed on top of them. The head of the family and the heads of the collectivities now once more repair to the *dokpwégq̃*; kneeling before him, and rubbing their hands together in supplication, they say: "It is you who command. It is you who must repurchase our lives for us. Tell us what must be done, that we may once again find peace." The *dokpwégq̃*, seated before them on his high stool,

remains silent until they add, "We wish to embark our dead from the other world." He answers them at last, saying, "The drums are ready. For man you must furnish a ram, and for each woman a she-goat. To this a buck must be added by the first friend of the one who was the first of your family to die. The ceremony will begin tonight."

That night the drummers, and the best friend of the oldest dead—or the one who represents this friend—leave to perform the ceremony called *xpdidè*—"to make the canoe go." Naturally, in a case such as the one being described, where those who were the first of the group of collectivities to die have been dead for some generations, the best friend of the one longest dead would also be long gone. However, in such a case, this best friend is impersonated by that member of his family who is designated by the diviner as possessing the soul of the original friend of the oldest dead as his *djótó* — his "guardian spirit."¹ When this ceremony is performed to "establish" the souls of those who died within the ten or fifteen years preceding the ritual, it might happen that the best friend of the first who had died since the preceding ceremonial would be alive, and he himself would be able to perform this rite. But whether as best friend or as representative of the best friend, he carries the buck desired as his sacrifice lashed to a wooden burden-carrier of the type called *akókó*. The *dokpwéqá* marches before him with the drummers, and all sing,

"Sweep the house and all about it,
For a friend from afar comes to visit the house.
He is quite near;
He has arrived."

When they arrive at the place of the ceremony, they find a small house of the type over which sacrifices to the dead are offered in the course of funeral rites.² If it is a large house, the friend climbs on its roof, if not, he stands beside it, holding the sacrifice in proper position. He cuts the throat of the buck and allows the blood to run through the loose thatch into the house, saying,

"My friend, during your lifetime we told each other all. We promised each other that when one of us should die, the other would come to cover his corpse with a large cloth. That I have already done. We also promised each other that when one of us should be on the other side of the river, the other would supply him with the horns of a he-goat

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 234-236

² See below, pp. 392ff.

to serve him as a bridge for reaching the other side. Here I bring you the buck. Come, visit us."

When this ceremony of the first friend has been completed, it is the turn of the living descendants of the sib dead to offer their sacrifices. They march in procession, with the small animals hanging from a bamboo pole. The *dokpwéqđ*, wearing the large hat which is a prerogative of his rank, takes the lead, his drummers with their drums and his suite following immediately behind him. They sing:

"We have come,
If it is well, you shall see.
If it is not well, you shall see."

Every person sacrifices a ram, two chickens, a pigeon and a duck for his father; a female goat and two chickens for his mother. Each man himself kills the ram he has brought, but once the animals die, no descendant of the ancestors to whom they are offered may touch even the bones. Were a son who had not been on good terms with his father to attempt to kill a sacrificial animal, he would be driven away and his offerings would be thrown after him. It is not strange, therefore, that such a son does not come. It is even held that he may not listen to the drums without hurt to himself. After the offerings for the fathers and earlier male ancestors have been killed, those for the female forbears are offered. The same song that was sung before is heard.¹

This portion of the ceremony takes two days or more to complete. It may last as long as five whole days, depending upon the number of dead to be deified. The beginning of it, however, occurs the night of the third day. On the last day of this portion of the rite the King, in pre-conquest times, or at the present time an important chief, sends a ram to be sacrificed for the souls of all of those men in the territory under his command who have died, a female goat for all the women, and eleven chickens for those of whom he has no knowledge. These are called the animals of Dadá (the King) and on the day they are sacrificed, it is known that the ceremonial will end the same night. This is important, for on the occasion of a rite such as this, friends of those who are recently dead come from great distances with offerings

¹ The relationship between a mother and her children was vocalized once more with the comment, "There is never the same difficulty of having to eliminate a child because he was not on good terms with his mother that there is in the relationship between a man and his father. Children do not quarrel with their mother." Indeed, the further comment was made that women are considered doubly fortunate, for they have two families, their own and that of their children.

in final token of affection, since such a ceremony is performed only once for any person who has died.

That night the great *gbwedji* drums are played to accompany the dance of the siblings. The *dokpwégq* sings,

“Your fathers and your kinsmen
Shall never wear torn cloths because of the
neglect of their children who remain in life;
And when fine cloths are worn,
Your ancestors shall appear in *lulúk pà*.¹”

When this song is finished, the family and all who have come to witness the ceremonial dance. The *dokpwégq* now sings, making seven separate circles with his staff as he does so.

“Give all you can to honor the memory of your dead,
For when later you come upon them in their abode
They will tell you they have received all you gave,
And you alone can make their boats go.”

Money, cloths, drink, tobacco, *dekwé* (bamboo-fiber, used as tinder), pipes, and beads are thrown into each circle; the cloths are white, the beads may be of any color. All this is called *módó gbúgbù*—“Be generous, that your relatives may speak for you there.” One of the circles that the *dokpwégq* makes is for the *dókpwe*. There are two for the *akovi*, one for the drummers, and three for the *dokpwégq*, and the gifts that are thrown into each of these circles go to the individuals for whom they have been designated.

With this dance and the giving of contributions the concluding portion of this initial ritual to deify the ancestors is reached. It is, in a measure, more private than anything that has gone before, and the greatest expenditure of the entire performance now takes place, making clear why family groups must save over a period of years to make possible the “establishment” of their ancestors as gods. For every soul deified, there must be two yards of cotton, a chick and much liquor. In addition, forty-one cauries, seven castrated goats, seven cocks, seven she-goats, and seven chickens are provided. The funeral drums which have been used heretofore have already been copied. Each sib must possess a bit of uncleared bush, perhaps fifteen by twenty feet, called *yèxòflì*, in which stands a large tree chosen by an elderly member of the sib. At midnight the *dokpwégq* and the head of the group deifying its ancestors go to this “forest.” Only the *dokpwégq* enters it, and he takes with him the cloth, the small pots

¹ This is the name of the most valuable cloth made in Dahomey.

and the chickens. On this night, the members of the family are told to retire early, for this ceremony is performed while they sleep. The *dokpwégq* addresses the chief saying, "As head of this sib, you must know the name of the one who began your line." Given the information the *dokpwégq* calls this name by whistling, as he did before, and tells him to receive his new children, who have just come. He digs a large hole and into this places all the small pots which represent the dead men of the group. He also places the seven live castrated goats and the cocks in this hole, and immolates them there. For the souls of the women of the family another hole is dug, where are placed the pots containing their spirits, the seven female goats, and the seven hens, after which it, too, is filled. A third is excavated, and here all the drums used in this ceremony for the dead are buried. The *dokpwégq* does all this alone, for any member of the family who entered this "forest" would die.

When this rite is over, the *dokpwégq*, leaving the "forest," instructs the head of the family to summon all his chiefs of collectivities, and of these he asks when they wish to receive these dead souls "who are at present in a boat on the river."¹ The reply comes in the form of another question, "Where are they?" "They are in a boat between Azili and Agbwadô." They then name a date, perhaps three months later. The *dokpwégq* then speaks again, "When you go to meet them at the lagoon, you must not forget to bring to their house your most ancient relatives, the *mexóró*, who call themselves Dambada Hwedo.² And do not forget above all to take the *txxsu*, because they command all." In reply, the elders of the family say once more, "In three months we shall take them."

All return to the place where the small mat "houses" are located and, entering their shelter, sleep for the rest of the night. In the morning, the *dokpwégq* instructs the family to shave their heads, and all, from the very oldest to the very young infants are shaved. This is done in the presence of the *dokpwégq*, who gives them sacred water with which to wash their heads. He then instructs the family to give their farewell gifts, and is presented with a male goat, four large cloths, and forty-one times seven francs fifty centimes. That day the *dokpwégq* makes three very small replicas of the *asé*, the altars at which deified

¹ This, of course, refers to the rivers of death which are supposed to separate the land of the living from that of the dead, and which are described below, vol. ii, p. 240.

² The concept of Dambada Hwedo, of primary importance in the ancestral cult, is discussed below, pp. 207-208.

ancestors are worshipped.¹ The first is for the men of the family, the second for the women, and the third for the groups composed of those women married into the family who died without offspring, and the stillborn or aborted children. These must be kept for the next series of rites, and as he gives them to the head of the family, the *dokpwégq* says, "Since the souls of your ancestors are no longer in the world of the dead, but are on the river journeying toward us, it can be said that they are *vody yehwe*.² Do not forget to fulfil in three months the promise you made in the sacred forest." The three small standards are then set up, and the ancestors are publicly "fed" with cooked beans and the blood of three goats, a ceremony called *alitasi*—"the way over the water." The members of the family group now return home, taking with them the hair that has been shaved, which they bury in the refuse heaps behind their individual houses. The *dokpwégq*, however, before he leaves, collects all the mats, the caury-shells and the animals used in the ceremony as his payment. With his departure, the first part of the ceremony to deify the ancestors is completed.

When the family return to their collectivities, they build a special house in the compound of the founder, which is destined to be their *déxoòd*. This house will be the one in which the worship of their ancestors will center. Here they put the three *asé* which have been given them, and here beans, chickens, rum, and goats are sacrificed to provide food and drink for the spirits of their forbears. During the interim between the two rituals, the members of the family pursue their daily routine as usual. Sometimes the promise to hold the next part of the deification ritual at a stated time—in this case three months—is not fulfilled. When this occurs, "members of the family begin to die", the head of the group being the first to pay the penalty for his neglect.³ As people die, the members of the sib call diviners

¹ Skertchly (p. 188), describes these *asé* in the following terms: "This curious offering is best described by imagining an inverted extinguisher, or the receptacle of a common naphtha lamp, to be fixed on the extremity of a long iron rod. Some are double, and all the principal ones are decorated by strings of cowries, as usual, copiously smeared with fowl's blood. In front of these altars were two heaps of sand moistened with holy Nesu water, which will hereafter be the resting-places of several human heads."

² The translation of this phrase was given as "gods-souls-sun," and in explanation it was stated that the dead have no sun. However, since *yehwe* is a term synonymous with *vody*, it is believed that either this term was substituted for another one too sacred to be spoken, or its meaning is that the souls of the dead, having left their abode to come here, are already, in a sense, deified.

³ This is only another instance of the reality, to the Dahomeans, of the danger inherent in the position of sib-head when dealings with the ancestors are involved, for it is said that it is only seldom that the elder in charge of a cere-

to ask the reason for the many deaths. Usually not until they hear from them that the cause of these deaths is the neglect of their promise to their dead, do they proceed with preparations for the second portion of the ceremony of "establishing" their ancestors.

It may be supposed, however, that this particular family has not been remiss. At the time named, therefore, they call a chief-priest of the ancestral cult.¹ It is to be noted that the *dokpwégq* is no longer consulted, inasmuch as once the ceremony in the bush has been performed, the souls of the dead are conceived as having achieved partial deification, hence it is not the official in charge of burials, but rather the chief-priest of the cult for ancestral gods who takes charge. In the Dahomean idiom, before the *dokpwégq* performs his rites, the spirits are called *chíò*—the dead—but after he has finished his ritual these are on the way to becoming *tvodú*—family deities—and are now under the control of the *tvodúnq*.

When the *tvodúnq* is called, he asks the number of dead whose souls are "on the river." This, like the former query, is a dangerous one to answer, because once again all names must be given, and not a single one forgotten. Cauries are again used as an aid to memory and the names of those who are dead are thus counted. For each soul the *tvodúnq* is given two open pots of the type called *agbanúsú*, as well as many pots of a form and shape peculiar to the *txxsu*, and to Dambada Hwedo, though the number consecrated to these last two is never stated. He is also given many calabashes, and as many mats as there are souls to be recalled, sixteen goats, two hundred and forty-one chickens and two lengths of white cloth, each of which is forty-one yards long. Finally, white and red clay, *hwé* and *zâ*, are provided.

On the day set for the ceremony, the family assemble before "the house of the gods," called *déxoò*. Nothing, however, is as yet placed inside it. All daub their faces, arms, and upper bodies as far as a line drawn just below the breasts with white clay. They also coat

many such as has been described survives it by more than three years, since it is extremely difficult to remember all the names of those who have died and the forgotten souls soon begin to take their revenge. However, it will be remembered from the discussion of sib organisation that the headship of a sib or group of collectivities is always lodged in the oldest man in the group. It is therefore unlikely that any person who attains this rank would not be well along in years.

¹ This would be a priest in charge of the cult-house where those who had been trained in the ritual for the ancestors of all Dahomey had received their instruction. This cult-house, which exists only temporarily, must be established by the royal house. It is this cult-house which the present head and his immediate predecessors have neglected to establish.

all the pots with white clay, and on this white surface make red spots. Finally, they lay the calabashes and pieces of white cloth before the "house of the gods." On this day the family go to the Dídô river in Abomey.¹ Each person must have an *azq̃y*—a fringe of raffia strands—about him, and the members of the family are accompanied by the *tvodínɔ* and two male cult-members. They take the pots, the cloths, and the calabashes with them and, when they arrive at the bank of the Dídô, they kill two goats and seven chickens. When this sacrifice has been made, all except the chief-priest and his two assistants draw back. Only the sound of rattles and gongs accompanies the songs they sing, for no drums are used at this time. The head of the group of collectivities giving the ceremony is summoned by the chief-priest, and with him comes the chief of the oldest group of dwellings. When the songs—described as too sacred even to designate by name—are finished, the chief-priest walks into the stream until he is up to his waist in water. He carries one pot in his right hand, and one in his left, and asks the name of the first person of the relationship group to have died. When the name is spoken, the chief-priest pronounces "strong words," stoops, quickly fills one pot and covers it with the other one. This is done for each of the male and female souls. When he has finished with this rite, he calls the family group once more to the place where the pots are and they sacrifice two more goats. By this time it is mid-day, and he tells the participants to await him in front of the newly-constructed house for the ancestors. While they wait, the chief-priest and his assistants, alone at the river, conduct a secret ceremony. When they return they come empty-handed, having left the pottery behind.

On his arrival the chief-priest tells the waiting family that the souls are now present. When he says this, he is asked, "Where are the pots we took to the river?" The chief-priest replies, "They have already been brought home." They repeat their question, "Where are they?" and in answer he says, "They are in the house." Thereupon the members of the family, entering the newly-constructed house of the ancestors which they had left empty, find the pots.² When the

¹ This is a river more in name than in fact, for though it may at one time have been a stream of observable size, today it is only a small dry channel. It is so sacred, however, that when water for the ancestral ceremonies is needed, ordinary well water is taken to the river in jars, poured in, and then dipped out ceremonially once more. It is undoubtedly the stream described by Burton (vol. ii, pp. 161-162).

² Just how this is accomplished was not only not made clear, but it was asserted that this is "a mystery," the fact being emphasized that all this is accomplished in broad daylight.

pots are found in the house, those present shout the praises of the chief-priest and go down in the dust before him, covering their foreheads with sand. Chickens, goats, and other animals, as well as figures of all kinds of metal—gold, silver and brass—are given to celebrate the installation of the newly deified spirits of the ancestors. The chief-priest takes for himself everything that has been used in the ceremony, leaving only the pots, but carrying away even the mats on which the pots had rested, or with which they had been covered. With this, the second portion of the ceremony comes to an end.

The souls of the ancestors are now regarded as deified, and the family must next make the necessary preparations for the first of the "customs" in which the living honor their dead. One of the things that must be done is to acquire drums, particularly the *zokwete*, long drums fastened with cords about the waist of the player and used only in the rituals of the ancestral cult. Whatever price is asked by the maker of these is given, and, in addition, gifts are tendered him. When they have been completed the priest of the cult then asks publicly of the entire sib-membership whether they are willing to have the souls of their ancestors descend on the heads of members of the family, so that these may dance. To this the response is given in the affirmative.

The priest next tells them that their remaining task preliminary to beginning the "customs" must now be fulfilled; that they must make their house for Dambada Hwedo. The same numbers of pots and mats and sacrifices that were necessary to "make a house" for the ancestors are also needed to establish one for Dambada Hwedo, and the ceremonial is the same. The only difference between the ceremonies is that this one is performed in the bush instead of at the river Didô, and pots of a special type, called *dqzê*, are employed, though no red or white coloring is put on them.

It has been said that Dambada Hwedo represents those ancestors who lived so long ago that not even their names are known. This concept may be worthy of some consideration, since it affords a measure of insight into the manner in which the Dahomean views his world. It has been remarked in several connections to what extent precedent and power goes with age; and how this is true not only in the world of men, but in the supernatural world as well. At the same time, the Dahomean, realizing the frailties of human memory, goes on the assumption that no matter how powerful an individual might have been, if he lived long enough ago he will have been for-

gotten. Indeed, this concept applies to the gods themselves, for the Dahomean, when pressed for his version of how the world was created, begs the question, since it is inconceivable to him that anything should have been created out of nothing, with the result that every mythological account of an "origin" tells of those whom the tale concerns coming into a universe not only already in existence, but also peopled. Therefore, although it is true that for every sib there is a *tshwiyô* who represents its human founder, and a supernatural parent of the *tshwiyô*, by some denoted the *aizô*, the Dahomean also argues that the supernatural parent must in turn have had parents, though these may be without designation even in the mythological accounts of sib-origins. Again, the Dahomean believes that it is impossible for any group of human beings to know all their relatives. As will be seen, he is fully aware of the fact of the slave-trade, and understands perfectly that many men, women and children related to him were carried away to die in places unknown. As individuals these persons have been lost; their names, if ever known, have been forgotten; their places of burial lost far beyond recall. Still others have wandered away from home and have died without even an effigy burial.

How important it is that the sib retain within its ancestral group the souls of all its members who have died will be made apparent when the custom of "buying back" the spirits of those who died of leprosy or small-pox, or those who died in childbirth, is discussed. Setting aside for the moment the significance of this, which will be pointed more sharply when the theory of the soul is considered, it is obvious that it is a paramount consideration for the Dahomean to retain the souls of all his ancestral spirits within the limits of the sib boundary in the other world. Therefore, the souls of those who cannot be called by name are not admittedly "forgotten," but are remembered as groups. Of these groups of souls, the strongest and most respected are those of the earliest ancestors, who lived so long ago that even the sib origin-myth does not tell of them. Only slightly less powerful than these are the spirits of those other forbears of the sib who met their death before the ancestral cult was perfected, and who, if they were strong, entered the great trees or took up their residence in high mountains. A forgotten soul is an angry one, and these early spirits, especially if their bearers were strong men and women, are powerful indeed. This is why, in the customs for the ancestors, Dambada Hwedo, the personification of these, dances before all others.

Chapter XII

THE ANCESTRAL CULT: WORSHIP OF THE ANCESTORS

Once a sib or group of collectivities has established its ancestors as *tvodu* by the ceremonies of deification described in the foregoing pages, the way is clear to follow the cycle of observances for them in the shrines they have constructed in their honor—the *déxoò* temple, and the Aido Hwedo house. Except when it is ascertained through a diviner that special offerings must be made to the ancestors to gain their aid or to avert their ill will, the *tvodu* are “fed” at ritually stated times. Ordinarily, these periods come in the early months of the year, toward the end of the dry season and before work in the fields must be resumed, though the ancestors are also regaled after the June and July harvests have been garnered, which is about the time when the royal ancestors are fêted.

In the course of the year, however, they may be approached whenever crises impend. Such typical appeals would be made to them as for their indulgence, through placating offerings suggested by a diviner, toward a marriage to which they had originally been opposed; for well being during a distant journey, as, for example, must be undertaken by a young man to perform military service in France; for their good offices to permit a woman of the sib to give birth safely to a healthy child; or for a boy to undergo circumcision without injury to his health or virility. A thank-offering would also be given them when this young man had returned from service—“war,” as it is termed—or when a daughter of the sib approached nubility. As has been said, these offerings, called forth by special circumstances, are customarily attended by no more ritual than the sacrifice of a cock or the gift of beans and corn meal. It is this type of offering which brings the ancestors closest to the life of the individual Dahomean, and makes them psychologically one of the most potent forces in shielding him from the malignant powers of the universe. Yet these humble approaches to the deified ancestors, without the more elaborate cyclical rituals that are to be described below, would be insufficient

to insure the protection they give their descendants. Like the human creatures they fundamentally are, the ancestors are held to love display and ceremonial, and they would resent a rôle of oblivion in the daily round of life. They would be angered by failure of the members of their sib to consummate the "customs" which publicly glorify their deeds while on earth, and bring them back to the world of the living for several days of enjoyment among their descendants.

These principal ceremonies associated with the worship of the ancestors occur, ideally, from year to year, though in reality they take place in full ceremonial regalia only every two or three years, or less frequently still when the sib is in financial straits. In such a case, the ancestors may be reasoned with; sooner or later, however, the ritual must be given, on pain of their displeasure and the severe punishments which angered supernatural beings can assess. For the purpose of describing a typical ancestral ceremony, it may be supposed that a given sib has arrived at the point in the worship of its forbears where the house of its ancestors has been built and consecrated, the Dambada Hwedo house completed, and the ritual drums have been finished. The spirits may now be brought back to this world, to be honored with dancing and other entertainment. When the time for such a ceremony has been determined by the diviners, the chief-priest of the ancestral cult is summoned, and informed that the sib wishes to bring back its members who are in the world of the dead. He thereupon asks the sib-head for the names of the most distinguished ancestors—those of the early sib members who had achieved high rank while alive. If the sib has position and wealth, there may be as many as twenty or more of these specified, and they are recalled by name, to be impersonated by dancers in the rites that follow—in native idiom, by those "upon whose heads their ancestors descend." The dancers who impersonate these ancestors must be costumed as richly as their distinguished forbears had been, and in all other respects act as the rank of the ancestors requires. The most desirable young people of the sib are designated for this purpose, their number varying, as stated, with the ability of the sib to clothe them. In dances of this type that were observed, from eighteen to forty performers took part. When the impersonators have been selected, the *tvodúnò*, the chief-priest, in characteristic Dahomean fashion, chides the head of the sib for forgetting the oldest ancestors of all, and chooses one or two of those who dance to be given to Dambada Hwedo. Thereupon additional members of the sib must be selected to fill the required complement.

The matter of selecting those ancestors who are to be impersonated by the dancers brings forward an aspect of the Dahomean ancestral cult which merits a short digression. Just as when, in speaking of the ancestors, the word *tvodɔ* was applied to them, so in speaking of the ancestral dances, the term *nesúxwè* was heard. The exact nature of the *nesúxwè*, however, was not simple to determine. All commentators agreed that the *nesúxwè* rituals are those for the princely dead, and all agreed also that by no means did every ancestral ceremony—*tvodɔ* rite—come within the *nesúxwè* category. This became evident when, in discussing the matter, it was stated that any relationship group that numbered among its members those who had directly served the King, in no matter how humble a capacity, might count their dead among the *nesúxwè*. Thus, at one ancestral rite the most important figure impersonated was a princess; in another it was a chief who had been Prime Minister to one of the early Kings; at another an ancestor who had been appointed head of one of the Dahomean provinces. Further point to these observations would also seem to be given by the remark that “the *nesúxwè* is the religion of the princes.” The King excepted, no member of the royal sib was permitted to worship any but his ancestral deities, and no prince or princess might become a *vodɔnsi*—a cult-initiate—of any of the great “public” pantheons. No ancestral dances were observed in Abomey which were not *nesúxwè* dances. That this was the case may have been caused not only by the fact that the principal period of the year when the ancestral rituals are held—late March until early May—was during the time this field-work was going on, but also because almost every family in Abomey has some connection with royalty, which would mean that most of the *tvodɔ* dances there are “within” the *nesúxwè*. In the regions outside Abomey, where people of humble status are found, the dances for the ancestors are simply called *tvodɔ* ceremonies, since none of those in whose honor the festivals are given are “among the *nesúxwè*.” In all instances, the ceremonies witnessed were as elaborate as the resources of the family allowed, for the rituals which mark all phases of death are characterized by the maximum possible expenditure, among the poor as well as among the rich.¹

¹ Earlier commentators, though thoroughly confused in the matter, support the view that the *nesúxwè* is a thing of the royal sib. Thus Burton (vol. i, p. 204) speaks in one place of “a large fetish-house, a long shed, called Nesu-hwe, and dedicated to Nesu, the peculiar Dahoman fetish, the tutelary numen of the empire”; while in another place (vol. ii, p. 97) he says: “Nesu, the proper Ifon fetish of Agbome, established by Agaja the Conqueror. It is worshipped in large sheds called Nesu-hwe, adjoining the various palaces. Its water pot is

Returning to the ceremony to be described, with the performers selected, the chief-priest assembles at his own house those who have been chosen, and there instructs them in such secrets of the worship of the ancestral gods as they must know to impersonate their ancestors. This does not mean that these young men and women take the status of cult-initiates in the worship of the dead. A person may only have this rank if he has gone through cult-house training which has been established for the dead of all Dahomey. As has been stated, no cult-house for the *tvodù* has existed for many years. Those who have gone through such training are either chief-priests, such as the one officiating in this instance, or are old people of priestly rank who must perform highly specialized and spiritually dangerous duties in the course of the ancestral ceremonies. The instruction that is given for the several days before the rituals begin is merely sufficient to enable the actors to give a creditable performance; and in addition, to provide these young men and women with such requisite magic as will permit the spirits of their ancestors to descend upon them, and to possess them when the drums sound. As a final element of preparation the drums are played before the house of the *tvodù* the evening of the third day, and the ancestors are told that on the following day they are to make their re-entry into this world. The opening of the ceremony itself is marked by the sacrifice of a goat before the *déxoxò*, the house of the ancestors. Those who had been designated to represent the ancestors appear, one at a time, each being denominated, as he comes forward,

known as Bagwe, and when the fetish women, guarded by Amazons, pass in strings towards the wells, they are fetching the element for the mysterious rites of Nesu." In a third place (vol. ii, p. 170), Burton again mentions "the Nesu-hwe, or fetish, in which the King sits when on his way to change palaces; ..." Skertchly twice notes this mysterious "Nesu fetish" (pp. 206 and 472), but seemingly follows Burton in his brief comment. Le Herissé fails almost entirely to identify the *nesiawè* with the *tvodù*, treating the two in different chapters, and coupling the former with the worship of the *taxou* (pp. 119-120). His remarks may be quoted: "*L'ènsouhouè et Tohosou*. — Bien que les *L'ènsouhouè* soient des fétiches particuliers à la famille royale, nous ... croyons ... qu'ils sont un composé du fétichisme et de la croyance à l'âme humaine, inspiré aux princes par le désir de conserver leur supériorité même dans l'au-delà. L'âme, *yé*, de l'un des leurs ne pouvait pas décemment aller, après la mort, retrouver les *yé* des autres Dahoméens, sans espérer autre chose que les sacrifices commémoratifs habituels des défunts; elle devint un *fétiche* qu'on appela le *L'ènsouhouè* et prit sa part du culte que les rois firent rendre publiquement à tous ses parents retrouvés, dans l'au-delà, *L'ènsouhouè* comme elle." In a footnote to the above, however, Le Herissé makes a point quite in accord with the information given at the present time: "Nous avons rencontré des gens qui prétendent que la croyance aux '*L'ènsouhouè*' est générale dans le royaume dahoméen. Dans ce cas, il faudrait admettre que le culte des morts et le culte rendu aux '*L'ènsouhouè*' se confondent et que les âmes (*yé*) des défunts, quels qu'ils soient, deviennent des fétiches (*vôdoun*)."

by the name of the ancestor whom he is to represent. Over the animal that is about to be slaughtered, the chief-priest performs a ritual which, though carried out in public, has as its essence secret elements that may not be disclosed to the uninitiated. The singing begins and shortly after the drums sound, whereupon, with the first beats of the drums, the spirits of the ancestors come to the heads of those named to represent them, and they dance.

Up to this point information concerning the ceremonies which "establish" the ancestors of a sib and which prepare the way for the actual *tovodù* rituals was obtained from accounts of informants. The wealth of detail which has marked the description of the rituals recounted above was due in no small measure to the stimulus exerted by the numerous *nesúxwè* dances that were occurring in Abomey and which, as public ceremonies, were being interestedly witnessed by audiences numbering many hundreds of natives not members of the sibs or groups of collectivities responsible for them. A number of these *nesúxwè* rites which, as has been stated, have a duration of many days—depending upon the sum which the group responsible for a given ceremony is able to spend—were observed, one in particular being visited day after day. It is this one which has been selected for a detailed description as representative of these dramas of the dead brought back to the world of the living by their descendants.

This ceremony was held in the quarter of Abomey which lies south of the great market-place, not far from the ruins of the mound called Adanzun—the *tumulus du courage* figured by Le Herissé.¹ On approaching the compound where the group giving the dance reside, many people were to be seen gathered about the clearing, a space some fifty feet square fronting the entrance to the compound. The compound wall constituted the eastern side of the cleared space, and on the northern border was a great tree, under which men with funerary drums, gongs and rattles were seated. This was the place of the orchestra. Across the clearing, and facing the drummers, stood the ancestral house; beside it a state umbrella sheltered an unoccupied high stool such as is used by men of rank on state occasions. The *aizq* of the family, which was nearby, had a fresh *azqη*—a circlet of palm fronds—about it, and at all other shrines in this clearing fresh blood and palm-oil of recent sacrifices could be seen. Four paths led to the place of the ceremonial, and a framework had been erected across each path. On the crossbar of these frames was also an *azqη*,

¹ Plate XXIIIa.

the palm-fronds dangling vertically toward the ground. The function of these *azq̃y*, in Dahomey as in all West Africa, is to act as a supernatural prophylaxis against evil reaching a sacred place, and all the processions of dancers, as they entered or departed from the dancing space, passed through one of these frames, under the *azq̃y*.

When first observed, the dancing-space was clear; the men in the orchestra were singing, but as yet no drums were sounding, the accompaniment being that of gongs, rattles, and the rhythms made by men beating their chests with the open palm of the hands. It may be observed parenthetically that the song is as important in the rituals for the ancestors as the drum is in the rituals for the gods; here it is song, not the sound of the drum, which calls the ancestral deities.

Almost at once, an elderly man emerged from the low thatched ancestral house to the right, bearing the body of a goat which had just had its throat slit. This man was the *ɔvodɔ́nɔ̀*, the chief-priest of the ancestral cult, and the goat had just been sacrificed to the returned ancestors. A bed of leaves was now placed on the ground in front of the shrine, and the goat was laid on it, while a young woman, facing the ancestral shrine, knelt before the animal, gazing at it intently. Just behind this young woman, also facing the shrine, four other young women prostrated themselves, their foreheads touching the ground. As the singing and striking of gongs and chests and the playing of rattles continued, two of the men in the orchestra appeared to be possessed; it seemed that one of these might begin at any instant to dance. After a time, an old woman took up the sacrificial goat, and, followed by a priest who carefully gathered up the leaves on which the body of the animal had rested, and by the young women who had attended it, walked toward each of the four entrances to the clearing, and allowed some of the blood to drip on the ground below each *azq̃y* which acted as a threshold into the clearing where the ceremonies were being held. As she did this, the drums began to sound, and holding the sacrifice under her left arm, she slowly danced about the cleared space three times in a counter-clockwise direction,¹ ending with a series of shuffling steps in front of the drums, while the young women who now followed her cried out a

¹ This direction brings the right shoulder to the outside of the circle, something worthy of note in the light of the numerous references in the literature, especially in Burton (as, e.g., vol. i, pp. 207-208) and Skertchly, that in the days of the kings etiquette always demanded that the right shoulder be presented to him in making the processional rounds that marked all public reception by royalty.

shrill greeting to the spirits. Following this, she was relieved of her burden, the body of the goat being taken into the compound.

From time to time, young men clad in fine garments danced about the cleared space with a kind of trotting step, with the drums playing an accompanying rhythm. Each one who danced in this way was possessed by the spirit of that ancestor—chief-priest, or diviner—he was costumed to represent. However, this dancing was not of long duration, for soon another goat was led from the compound into the dancing space and tied for a moment to the posts of the low thatched ancestral shrine. Two men took it up, one holding it by the front legs, the other by the hind legs, and these two flung it upwards onto the thatched roof seven times. Each time the animal was thrust upwards, he was dragged roughly along the thatch and then allowed to strike the ground with a thud. His loud bleating throughout this showed, however, that he did not strike the ground with sufficient violence to be stunned. This rite had as its purpose the notification of the *tvodu* inside that their food—that is, the blood of the animal—was being brought to them. "This is done to let the owners of the place know that someone is coming to their house with food for them." As the goat was lowered the seventh time, his body was allowed to rest on the ground for a moment, and then, with a skillful incision of the knife, his throat was cut. As is customary in making Dahomean sacrifices, the animal was held so closely that there were no convulsions; in fact, except that the animal's tail was observed to twitch, no movement of the body indicated death.¹ The blood was allowed to flow only at the will of those who held the body; some of it was made to drip into a calabash tray, as had been the case with the first goat, and one of the priests walked about the cleared space with this calabash sprinkling the *aizɔ*—the pot over the mound of earth near the *déxorò*—that watched over this group of compounds. Blood was also sprinkled beneath the framework over each entrance to the dancing-space. As this was being done, the body of the second goat was laid on leaves as the first had been. Only one girl crouched beside it, watching until it, too, was taken up in the same way as the first animal, but by another women who, even older than the first, danced as her predecessor had danced about the cleared space, though with a more feeble shuffle, for she was very old, and the animal was

¹ This skillful trussing of a sacrificial victim is commented on frequently in the literature, and, in pre-conquest days, applied to human as well as animal offerings.

heavy. These two were among the most important individuals associated with this rite. The young women who knelt before the goat were merely some of those who had been newly selected to impersonate their ancestors, but the old women, who carried the sacrificial animals, had gone through the training necessary to become initiates of the ancestral cult, and therefore had the requisite spiritual protection to enable them to perform the dangerous task of touching food intended for the ancestral spirits.

After the sacrifice of the second goat another lull occurred, but in a few moments several young women, also clothed in elaborate costumes as befitting the position of the ancestors who now possessed them, began to dance. With the drums sounding they formed a line of twos, and one couple behind the other they danced in the customary counter-clockwise direction about the edges of the cleared space, finally forming a single line in front of the drums, which they faced as they danced vigorously. Retreating in line to their place on the south side, before the ancestral temple, they remained standing there, while one after another of their number danced singly, moving toward the drums and then retreating before circling the dance-space. After this had continued a short time, a woman who helped direct the ceremony, but who herself was not a dancing participant, came through the compound door, bearing a cloth in which something had been wrapped. She walked carefully toward the costumed young women, and took out four horse-hair switches. These switches, of the type often mentioned by the earlier writers,¹ indicated that the ancestors represented by the dancers who were to carry them had been important priestesses. Each of these women then circled the open space with the galloping step demanded by the ritual, stopped, faced the drums, did a few dance-steps in place, and then, turning, proceeded to the center of the dance clearing and faced the ancestral shrine. Once there the dancer was met by a crouching, softly-stepping assistant who relieved her of her switch, offering a bent back as a support on which to lean a hand as they both proceeded to their place. This bit of dramatisation was a part of the re-enacting of the whole setting of the life of the ancestors demanded by the ritual—a bit of pageantry that included not only the appropriate clothing and insignia of office, but also the representations of slaves to support the mistress or master of high rank after dancing. The reason for the presence of this crouching assistant had as its purpose in the life of the ancestor, as

¹ e. g., Skertchly, p. 343.

it has now, to prevent a dancer possessed by a spirit from slipping, for to slip while in a state of possession is spiritually most hazardous. From time to time this dancing by individual women was varied by the forward movement of the entire group, who, when they reached the drums, retreated, but always kept their line. After a half-hour of this, the place of the young women was taken by a group of young men. The men danced with the same step as the women, alternating solo and group dancing as had the others. In accordance with Dahomean ceremonial usage before royalty, no mixed dancing occurred, and the men gave way once more to the women after they in turn had held the stage for about half an hour.

The ceremonial, which had begun shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon, continued until darkness fell—that is, until after half-past six. The dancing had had the unbroken accompaniment of drum-rhythms and songs, with the music punctuated from time to time by cries from the elderly men and women who were sitting with their backs to the compound wall, facing the side of the compound where the guests were gathered. These cries called the “strong” names and deeds of the illustrious ancestors who possessed the various dancers, and served to intensify the general excitement of the occasion. No special ceremony marked the cessation of the dance at the end of the afternoon’s performance, and this was also true of the ending of the ritual on all the other days, except the final one.

The second day of this *nesiwè* ceremony proved to be much more elaborate than the first, both in costuming and general arrangements. The dancing, as it continued from day to day, presented a progressively richer pageantry; and it was evident that the staging was directed toward a cumulative effect of magnificence. An impression was also conveyed, and was emphasized as the rites of subsequent days were witnessed, of the extreme liturgical character of the ceremony as a whole. The dancing was done by trained persons, who had obviously studied their rôles, and who were in charge of specialists who saw to it that each step was meticulously executed. As on the preceding day the dancing began shortly after four o'clock, but no public sacrifices were offered. What occurred inside the compound wall cannot be stated, although in answer to questions on this point, it was said that the compound was merely regarded as the dwelling-place of the participants during the ceremony, and that none of the ritual went on inside its walls. Underneath the great umbrella to the right on the chief’s stool a dancer was now seated, who wore a chief’s cap and

carried a chief's sceptre. As he sat on his high seat, his feet rested on the back of a fellow who crouched before him as a slave would have done in ancient times, and he was supported by those who were ancestors of lesser rank. This man represented a *Meú* who had served one of the early Kings as the second highest official of the realm. Two of the dancers, who wore chief's caps but were garbed in white, represented *Dambada Hwedo*, the ancient ancestors. These alone did not personify definite individuals. From time to time, on this second day, there were pauses in the dancing, during which a steady drum-beat accompanied the falsetto singing of a singer whose rôle was to recount in song the deeds of each of the ancestors.¹ On this occasion, as he finished a song, the chorus of voices, rattles and gongs took up a new refrain; the rhythm of the drums changed and the patterned dancing was resumed. First the line of men moved forward, to dance before the drums; then, returning, some of the dancers danced singly, with those of highest rank being relieved of sceptre or horse-hair switch by a stooping figure impersonating a slave. When all of the men's group had had their turn in dancing alone, the line once more moved across the dancing space to the drums. Again returning, the men rested, as the women took their places. On this second day, the recess was taken shortly before seven o'clock, when it was almost dark. The end came very simply, with the drummers stopping their beat, the old singer chanting a song to indicate the day's end, and the dancers trooping into the compound.

This *nesúxwè* ceremony began on April eighth, and did not end until the evening of April twentieth. Though it was visited from time to time, it is unnecessary to detail the procedure day by day, since the rites open to public view, at least, did not differ except in details of costuming from one day to the next. During this time—the first and last days alone being excepted—the spirits of the impersonated ancestors were being called one after another to the heads of the young people who, though they represented the most distinguished of the forbears, yet danced for all of them. As the name of each ancestor was called, his deeds recounted and his praises sung, one of the dancers possessed by his spirit, would circle the clearing. As far as could be observed—and this was corroborated by informants—there was no

¹ In all the cults of Dahomey, only the members of the Earth pantheon and the *nesúxwè*—both as rulers of the earth—have the right of improvisation at their rituals. Improvisation gives scope for both self-glorification and derision of the foibles of others, and both themes are given free rein by the professional singer who leads all song.

activity of a ritual nature in the compound until about four o'clock, when the ceremony was resumed. The performers lolled about, and, released from the strain of possession, rested and were cared for by as many of the other inhabitants of the collectivity giving the dance as were needed, while the others, whose services could be dispensed with, went about their daily tasks.

If the night was clear and the spirits, who are always eager for more and more dancing, were especially insistent in their display of restlessness, private dancing took place inside the compound. Such a dance was observed in connection with another *nesúxwè* ceremony, and, like all of this type, was impromptu and intended only for the residents of the compound. These evening dances are held to be the "pleasure-dances" of the *tvodú*, and it is said that when the head of the sib giving the rite fails to furnish the orchestra, the *tvodú* themselves organize a dance inside their house. There can thus be no doubt that this is an integral part of these cyclical rituals of the ancestral cult.

On the night to which reference is had, a full moon dimmed the few lanterns in the inner court-yard of the compound where the public dances of this *nesúxwè* rite had been witnessed that afternoon. The name of the dance itself is *kpě*, derived from the fact that the principal rhythms are obtained by men beating their hands against their chests. During practically the entire time this dance was observed, all the dancers of the afternoon were present and dancing opposite the orchestra, which was composed entirely of men. The musicians, in addition to singing and beating their chests, struck iron against iron, used several rattles and two gongs, one of them of the large type from which two tones were obtained, the first by striking it as it was held in the hand, the second as it rested on the ground. No drum is used in these evening *tvodú* dances. The spontaneity which characterized the dancing was in sharp contrast with the rigidity of the ritualised movements seen earlier in the day. This was true both of the dancers, who occasionally seemed so eager that they almost stepped on the heels of one another, and the members of the orchestra, who seemed to let themselves go utterly in the brilliant moonlight. The style of the dancing, however, was of the type seen at other social dances, though when the dancers faced the orchestra, they occasionally executed some unusually excellent figures of muscle manipulation.

In view of the day-to-day similarities in the ritual, only the dances which took place on one day of the ceremony need be described, and for this purpose those of the "sixth" day—that is, the fifth, if European

counting is observed—may be selected. In addition to this, the ceremonies which marked the last day will also be detailed.

On this "sixth" day, then, the performance began in the rather desultory fashion that invariably marked the beginning of a new day of dancing. There were not more than a few people on the spectators' side of the clearing, and the songs, accompanied only by rattle and gong, were being sung without receiving much attention. After a time, the line of costumed men emerged from the compound, followed by the women, and all circled the cleared space, going to the shrines and through the four improvised doorways over which hung palm-fronds, passing the shrine to Legbá, the mound sacred to the *aizǫ* and the low house to the south of the cleared space dedicated to Dambada Hwedo. The one who impersonated the Meú was escorted by an umbrella-carrier, and together with another who was with him, carried a sceptre. This procession, to the accompaniment of drumming as well as singing, was led by the two young men who wore the caps of chiefs, but whose costumes of unornamented white cloth showed that they represented Dambada Hwedo.

Since the costuming of the dancers became more lavish on succeeding days of the ceremony, the participants were now clad in richer garb—in velvets and brocades, said to have been bought during the monarchy. Several women wore cloths with appliqué designs similar to those seen on the walls of the palace of King Glele, that is, of the elaborated maltese cross. Two of them had short carved sabres in their belts.¹ All the women wore ornate silver bracelets, which on some reached eight or ten inches up the arm, and heavy armlets of silver as well, while two bore crescential shield-like ornaments of silver over their breasts suspended about their necks by silver chains, and one had wide bands of red and white spaced beads on her arm. Nine of the women and five of the men carried horse-hair switches. Except for the participants and those who sang the sacred songs, all present bared their shoulders and wore cloths no higher than the waist.²

The dancing was accompanied, as before, by shouts glorifying the deeds of the dead whom each dancer represented. These were uttered by the same woman who, clad in a simple cloth from hips to knees and

¹ These women, in all probability, represented commanders of Amazons, since their dress fits so completely the description of these female warrior-chiefs given by Burton, vol. i, pp. 170–171.

² This, of course, does not mean that European shirts were discarded, for these are not regarded as covering the shoulders, since in the sight of the ancestors it is only the native cloth that counts.

with a child on her back, has already been described as one of those directing the ceremony, and who sat through the long rites without dancing, her back to the compound wall. Beside this woman was an older one who assisted her and, at times, corrected her. Seated near the musicians were the two men with their robes draped over their shoulders, who sang the songs glorifying the ancestors. Much of their singing was falsetto and at times took the form of a kind of declamation during which they moved nearer the drums, walking about excitedly, shaking their fingers in admonitory fashion at the dancers and spectators. Each of the dancers, both when circling about the cleared space as one of a group, or when dancing individually, stopped when near the drums, faced them, and executed a short figure.

The principal variation from the dancing already observed was a group dance that glorified the conquests of the Dahomean kings in which the ancestors had taken part, and that was intended to recall the exploits of the ancestors themselves in these campaigns. The dancers, men and women, formed a single line with their backs to the compound wall. As the drums changed their rhythms and new songs began, the line moved forward. Each dancer clasped in both his hands a horse-hair switch, with the hair wound about the handle so that it could not come loose. Stooping, each then went through the motions which would be necessary to roll on the ground the skull of a defeated, decapitated enemy. With these movements the line slowly made its way across the dancing-space until it had reached the western side, when, going off at a right angle, the ritual dance was resumed, with a procession going counter-clockwise, as always, around the dancing-space.

The young man who impersonated the *Meú* was now seated on his stool as before, and danced only rarely. When he or the other important characters who, like him, carried a sceptre danced, those who impersonated slaves offered assistance, as was also done when the three principal women dancers danced. Two of these three were the old women who had carried the sacrificial animals in the ritual of the first day. The third, a large woman in her twenties who was accounted by all the best dancer present, impersonated a priestess. As the dancers stood about the south end of the dancing space, women came up to them, prostrated themselves and kissed the ground before them. In acknowledgement, the dancers touched the backs of their heads gently with their horse-hair switches, for those who were possessed and were, by that token, to be regarded as the ancestors, might not

speak, but must acknowledge the greetings of their "descendants" in this fashion. An incident which served to indicate the seriousness of the rite and the necessity for its being carried out without any untoward happening occurred about this time, when some object carried by one of the dancers dropped on the ground. The chief-priest in charge of the entire performance, who outwardly figured in it only as a spectator, was on his feet at once, as was the woman with the child on her back who cried out the deeds of the ancestors. With several others, these two hurried to the spot where the fallen object lay and, taking it up, carried it away into the compound without, however, interrupting the dancer then performing. The ceremony, on this day, lasted until dark. As on the preceding days, the recess was taken without special ceremony, for as night came on, performers and audience quietly dispersed.

The last day of these rites for the departed ancestors is particularly important both as pageantry and ritual, for at this time the celebration rises to its climax in the ceremony that sends the ancestors back to their home in the other world. As will be seen, this is fraught with danger, since the ancestors, who are conceived as still relishing the associations of the world of the living, are not too eager to leave.

On the final afternoon of these ceremonies, the dancing space in front of the compound was almost entirely deserted at about half past three. A few children were about, playing with dolls or engaging in a form of "tag," but other than the palm-fronds over the paths and the remains of sacrifices, there were no indications that anything unusual was about to occur here. Ten or fifteen minutes later some of the drums were brought out of the compound, and as the drummers began to tune their instruments and to play, the children formed a procession, and imitated the manner in which their elders began each day's ceremony. They went about the cleared space, covering the same route and performing the same steps as the real dancers, all this with much merriment. They were generally encouraged, and though wrong steps were corrected, on the whole they gave a very creditable performance, which was not without significance as indicating the manner in which relatively young children learn the ritual dances of their elders. Shortly after this, the real dancers emerged from the compound. Their procession differed but little from those of previous days, except that there were more persons in it than before, and the tours that were made were more extensive, the group sometimes going so far from the dancing-space that they were entirely out of sight. During these

preliminary visits to the sacred spots in and about the collectivity, the principal ritual singer appeared and took his place near the drums. This day he wore one of the broad hats which is the mark of an elder, and participated more continuously than at any previous time, leading the singing during the entire afternoon.

The preliminary tours completed, the dancers formed their line at the southern end of the dancing-space, and as usual first the men and then the women danced in line toward the drums, this group dancing being succeeded by individual performances. Men and women alternated for perhaps an hour, the only difference between the dancing of this and other days being that those who impersonated the most distinguished ancestors, especially the young man who impersonated the Meú, danced more often than before. New to the ceremony were two young men, dressed alike, who represented the spirits of a pair of twins. These also took a prominent part. After these usual dances, however, changes from past routine began to be apparent. First the dancers formed four groups, two of them composed of men, and two of women, among them several older persons who had not participated before. Each group in turn danced back and forth several times from their place to the drums.

The chief of the group of collectivities giving the ceremony at this time also made his first public appearance since this ceremony had been under observation. He sat on a low stool, with his back to the compound wall, opposite the spectators, with some of the elders of the family grouped about him. After he had been seated for perhaps a half-hour the "Meú," taking a horse-hair switch in each hand, danced counter-clockwise about the clearing until he stood facing the chief when, handing him the switches, he invited him to dance. Instead of himself dancing, however, the elder laughed and designated two others of the group about him to take his place, one man older than himself and the other somewhat younger. Those standing about were, in the main, amused at this, though one person commented, "He is too fat to dance, but just the same it is shameful when the head of a family cannot dance for his own *tvody*." The first of the older men he had designated to dance for him went about the circle, employing the ritually correct step, to the accompaniment of much cheering and laughter which ended as he sat down, and a similar volume of applause greeted the second elderly dancer. In watching these men, it could be seen how important is form in the apparently simple steps of the ancestral dance, for the inadequacies in the dancing of these two men

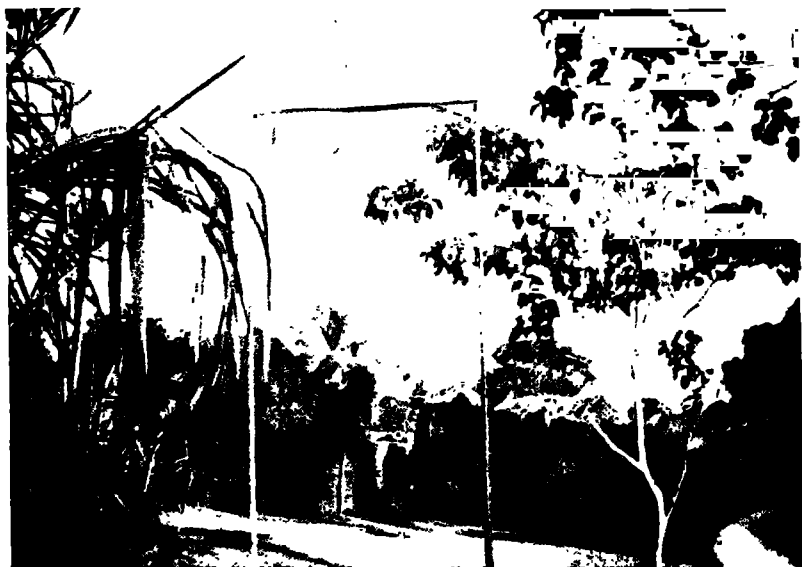
were very apparent when contrasted with the finished performance of those who participated in the ceremony day after day.

When the elders were seated, the young man who impersonated the Meú, again taking the two switches, danced once more about the circle until he arrived at the place where the chief-priest of the ancestral cult was sitting and, handing them to him, summoned him to dance. He responded and at once, in spite of the fact that he is a man well beyond middle age, showed his training in the excellence of his dancing-style. As he finished, all those who had represented the ancestors gathered at their place near the ancestral shrine and, in a group, walked toward the chief, singing to him for a period of perhaps five minutes. The song was of the type sung by the trained choruses of chiefs' wives,¹ and had as its purpose the recital of the glorious deeds of the ancestors. From the chief, the group proceeded to the tree under which the drums were stationed and, after singing there, they moved to the west side of the dancing-space where the spectators were gathered, this time standing in front of their white visitors. The burden of all their songs was that the *tvodɛ* were well pleased with the treatment that had been accorded them by their descendants; that they would look after the household when they had returned to the next world; that those who remember their ancestors, and fulfil their duties toward them, will be rewarded; and that the "house" from which these beings had come would flourish, since they would see to it that many children were born to make the sib strong.² The third song over, the dancers again went to their accustomed place and, in a line, advanced and retreated several times toward and away from the drums, the "Meú" performing solo dances.

Now came the turn of the individual deities to dance; the first of these to be called were the *taxsu*, the abnormally born of the family. The beat of the drum changing, four women and two men danced in a half circle, making their steps faster and less restrained as the rhythm of the drums quickened. These six, after a few moments of their dance, retired to the background to give place to one who represented Dambada Hwedo, so that he might dance for the oldest, the most powerful, but unknown ancestors who merged in this deity. His was

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 66 ff.

² Though these songs were translated as they were sung, it was impossible, due to the exigencies of the situation, to take them down at the time. Unfortunately, due to their sacred character, and the fear of singing them at a time not ritually appropriate, it was also impossible to obtain either texts or translations when away from the ceremonial situation.



a) The scene of the Nesúxwè ceremony; the magically protected entrance.



b) Bringing the principal drum to the place of the Nesúxwè ceremony.



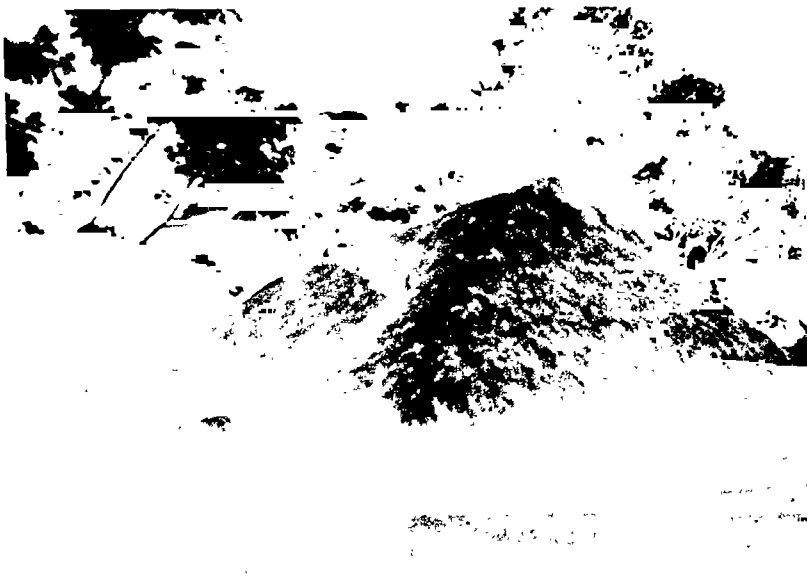
b) "From time to time, young men clad in fine garments danced about the cleared space with a kind of trotting step. . . ."



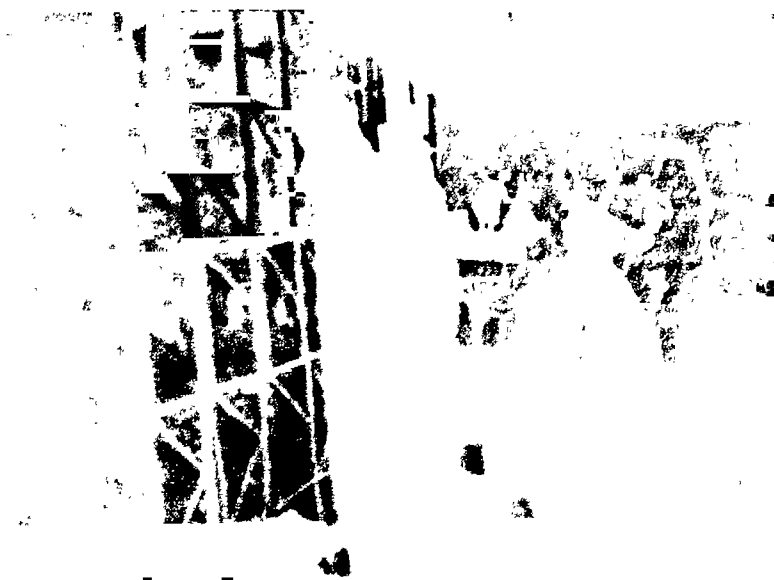
a) "Two of the dancers, who wore chief's caps and were garbed in white, represented Dambada Hwedo, the ancient ancestors...."



b) "The principal variation...was a group dance which glorified the conquests of the Dahomean Kings in which the ancestors had taken part...."



a) One of the temples for the royal *torosu* in Abomey.



b) Paintings on the wall of the temple for Zumadunu. (Cf. Le Herissé,



Dancers for gods of various categories at a ceremony in honor
of the Tāhwiyo.



Thunder cult initiates dance for their Tahwiyó at a ceremony given
by their sib.

the "strongest" dancing of the entire ceremony. The drums would beat quickly, the dancer throwing his body from side to side—as is characteristic of the dancing to the snake deities—until, shrieking as he fell, he would sink back into the arms of an aide who stood ready to catch him. He did this seven times and then gave way to the *torosu*, who danced once more.

The priest in charge of the ceremony now arose and, singing five songs, gave his injunctions to the ancestral spirits who were soon to return to their home in the other world. The burden of the first was that though humans could not see into the darkness, they, the ancestors, could look everywhere and observe everything and hence must watch over the living. The second song asked the ancestors not only to greet the souls of any strangers who came to see them in their own behalf but also on behalf of their descendants. In the third song, the ancestors were told that after their return to the other world, they should come among the living only when summoned. The fourth song told them to take away with them the songs that had been sung in their honor, but not the voices of the singers; to take the drum-rhythms but not the hands of the drummers. Finally, in the fifth song, the ancestors were asked to help the priest himself in his work and to give him more power, so that his undertakings might meet with success. As these songs were sung, the dancers slipped away into the compound a few at a time. When they returned, they wore the same simple clothes that they had worn on the first day of the ceremony. The singing over, the dancer who represented Dambada Hwedo, with a long white cloth over his head, came forward, since he was now being addressed in the song the chief-priest was singing. As he moved about restlessly in his place, he was told that he was to lead the way back, that he was to see that none of the spirits of his descendants strayed, and that he was not to return with them to this world until called.

By this time dusk had come and the light was fast fading; the large crowd that had gathered—the largest of the entire ceremony—was melting away. Those who remained were asked if they were going to stay to the end; and, if there was likelihood of their not knowing the proper procedure, instructions were given them as to what they must do, for this was the time of danger for the living, since now the spirits of the ancestors were about to be sent back to the other world. This was the reason why the clothing of the first day was again being worn by the dancers. The spirits had been on a journey; they had had their visit; and now that they were returning, the clothes in which they

had travelled must again be worn. Near the drums the songs went on incessantly. Now the sib-head laid before the drums the gifts for the ancestors, to help them on their way. Caury-shells were given to buy what they should need during their voyage; drink, so that they might refresh themselves; tobacco and cloths, which they were to give in payment of their voyages across the rivers of death, and across the mountain that separates the two worlds.¹

The dancers once again advanced, the men touching the gifts with their feet as a sign of acceptance, the women making a gesture in the air as of taking the things spread before them, grasping at the shades of the objects which the spirits they represented were to carry with them. In a massed movement, drums and singers then gathered in the center of the cleared space. It was so dark that their faces could scarcely be seen, though the white cloths which the dancers wore stood out plainly as the participants held their accustomed line.

With the drums sounding a new rhythm, the songs of departure began. As they departed the dead were asked once more to take only the notes of the drum, and not the hands of the drummers; only the melodies of the songs, not the voices that had sung them. Accompanied by more songs, they proceeded on their way. Now they came to the first river; the guardian who must take them across it demanded money; they gave it and were ferried over it. They reached the second river; this boatman demanded tobacco; it was given, and they were across. They reached the mountain and toiled up its steep sides. The guardian on top demanded cloths, and those with which they were provided were used to appease him. Finally they came to the last river that separated them from the land of the living; their descendants must call the boatman or they could not cross. There were yet final injunctions to be given them, however. Dambada Hwedo, the swiftest as well as the oldest, was told to hurry home and notify the cook that a meal be ready for the others when they returned; the dead were asked to remember those on earth to their friends who might be encountered in the spirit world; they were requested not to forget the trouble which their children among the living had taken to honor and remember them; they were told to watch over and prosper their children, and to intercede for them with the great spirits. Then all cried out three times to summon the ferryman at the third river; this was the real moment of departure. "It is dangerous," breathed one

¹ For details of the journey which the soul makes to reach the land of the dead, see below, vol. ii, pp. 239 ff.

man, and, as the dancer representing Dambada Hwedo moved into the darkness, all present arose and stood so that bodies, hands, clothing did not touch, while a child, running about, who might have come too close, was angrily driven away. In the darkness, the shadowy forms of participants and observers could be discerned doing dance steps, as they sang the ancestors back to the other world, the dancers themselves in their cloths of white grouped closely. Finally the song abruptly ceased. The chief-priest came close, the spectators shook hands with him and with each other, and took their departure. As one turned to look back, after a few steps, no one was to be seen. Only a chorus of many voices could be heard continuing the song that had last been sung.

This, then, was the ending of the *nesúxwè* ceremony. All that night, the place where it had been held was regarded as spiritually dangerous, for the servants of the ancestral spirits were about, packing up the "luggage" of their ghostly masters. No one went near the compound or the dancing place; those who could not altogether avoid the quarter where it was located made a wide detour, while those of the compound itself, or of neighboring compounds did not venture outside their doors. All had stood without brushing against their neighbors during the last song to make sure that no one might be swept away when the spirits left; for since the dead hold hands while "crossing the rivers" so that none of them will be lost, were others than those spiritually consecrated to touch hands, they, too, would be carried to the land of the dead.

This *nesúxwè* ceremony may be taken as typical of the ancestral rites that honor the spirits of those associated with royalty. Another ancestral ceremony of this category may here be drawn upon, however, to illustrate some variants in the manner of observance of a number of rituals of the same general class. It was held in a quarter of Abomey not far from the ruins of Tegbesu's palace, and was given by a princely family. In essence there were few variations to be seen, though the costuming was not so elaborate as in the dance reported, and the dancing, at least during the second day of this rite, was done principally by women. The style of dancing was the same, the horse-hair switches were held in the same manner, while the presence of the four entrances to the dancing-space guarded by palm-fronds, the ancestral house, the small pot turned downward on a low mound of earth—the *aizǎ*—and the great tree with its *azqy*, might all have come from the other compound. Yet, from the point of view of a native Dahomean, there were differences of real significance between the two ceremonies. This

being a princely house, even though a "little" one—which is to say an unimportant branch—there was less restraint for the dancers on the principle that royalty enjoyed rights that those of common blood did not share, even though these latter might be of high appointive rank. Consequently, there was less stiffness in the execution of the dances and general behavior, and the dancers would themselves sing from time to time; the cloths were worn over one shoulder as befitting princely rank; the men were occasionally seated while the women danced, or the women remained seated while the men performed; one of the dancers was even observed smoking his pipe. Basically, of course, the ritual, in its inception and intent, was the same for the two ceremonies, yet it is of significance that these recognized differences exist as accepted variations.

It may be recalled that "within the *nesúxwè*" are included both princely ancestors and the ancestors of those who have been associated with royalty, but that these may only be regarded as an individualized group of those family deities whose worship comes under the more general *tvodú* cult. What, then, is the status of this greater cult? What are some of the spirits conceived as belonging to it? And what is the relationship between these various groups of spirits?

A consideration of these questions may well begin with a discussion of the attributed neglect of duty toward the dead of Dahomey of which the head of the royal sib has for a long time been guilty. The last cult-house for the ancestors of the entire kingdom existed many years ago.¹ In describing the *nesúxwè* ceremonial, it was seen how important were the officiants who had gone through the initiatory rites of such a cult-house, for it is they alone who possess the essential training to permit them to touch an animal sacrificed to the ancestors. The last cult-house was established so many years ago that most of those who had received this training are dead, and it is urgent that another soon be instituted, though it is believed that this will hasten the death of the head of the royal family. In the last one, it is said, some three thousand initiates came from the important groups in each sib all over the kingdom, to go through the long initiation. Most of the survivors are elderly folk. When they die, there will be no one able to touch a sacrificial animal, and thus will even greater evil befall all the Dahomeans, and the entire royal family will die out. Furthermore, the only remaining priest to have knowledge of how the cult-house is to be conducted, and how the initiates must be trained, is already old. The

¹ Figures given varied from twenty-seven to eighty!

fact that this knowledge must pass orally from one generation to the next, in the course of training, is only another reason why the cult-house should be instituted during the lifetime of this priest, so that mistakes that might be costly to the Dahomeans may be avoided.

In spite of such serious considerations, the head of the royal sib continues to hesitate. When it is remembered that he must, on penalty of his life, recall the names of "all Dahomeans" who have died during the time that has elapsed since the last cult-house was organized—that, as was maintained, perhaps even a mistaken name will call down the penalty on him—his hesitation is understandable. Whatever the case, it is regarded as inevitable that his death will follow shortly after the ceremony is undertaken. Five years ago, it is said, all the members of the royal sib came together in council and many diviners were asked to consult Fate. These men all declared that the dead were clamoring for recognition, and they especially emphasized that the chief of the *txaxsu*, the deformed ancestors, was threatening vengeance. A bullock was sacrificed to quiet him, but the members of the royal sib are uneasy in their knowledge that this duty cannot be put off much longer.

Mention of the chief of the *txaxsu* brings into the discussion a group of spirits who are perhaps more feared than any other beings of the supernatural world. Their position among the spirits of the dead may be first explained. The ancestral cult, as described thus far, consists of the worship of the deified ancestors, the *txvodɔ*, who, separated into sibs, are headed by their various *tohwíyɔ̌*. Even more powerful than these *tohwíyɔ̌*, because older, but less feared because more generalized, are the oldest ancestors, the spirits of those whose names are no longer known by their descendants, subsumed in the character of Dambada Hwedo. The spirits of twins and of the children born after twins also enter in the *txvodɔ* categories, while finally the *txaxsu*, with Zumadunu, their chief, are included.

The *txaxsu* represent the spirits of all the malformed and aborted children born of human mothers, though the translation of their name is "Kings of the water." During the native regime, Dahomean practice "gave to the river" all children who were born with hair, or teeth, or who were hermaphroditic, or who had less than the usual number of fingers or toes—that is, those children who had anomalous characteristics of any sort, since it was believed that their spirits should be returned to the rivers, where they belong. The foremost power of the *txaxsu*, who constitute the guardians of the rivers over which the

spirits of the dead must pass to find their way to the other world, is that when they are offended they can obstruct the passage across these rivers so that the dead cannot proceed to the other world. Thus angered, the vengeance of those who have been baulked recoils upon the living, and as a result misfortunes occur. Insofar as the *txxsu* represent royal abnormal births, they enter into the *nesúxwè*, and since royalty commands in the other world as in this, the oldest royal *txxsu*, Zumadunu, the abnormal child born to King Akaba, heads the group. It is said that after Akaba, each subsequent King had at least one abnormal child, and all these are thought, if well disposed, to appear on the field of battle with their subjects as warriors, conquering the enemy without the need of a single thrust of a weapon of the soldiers; or, if evilly intentioned, bringing much harm upon the land. The fear in which the *txxsu* are held, and the power which they are thought to exert, may be understood from the following legend:

As long ago as the reign of Akaba these little people, who live in the water, were known to the Dahomeans. Akaba neglected to do anything to placate them, because he realized how dangerous it was to establish their cult. Agadja, his successor, like his father was afraid to establish the worship of the *txxsu*. Impatient at the delay, they once avenged themselves on him by appearing on the battle-field when his army began an attack on some of his enemies, assaulting his men and, in their anger, killing his entire force. Despite this warning, Agadja did nothing, and, when he died, and Tɛgbesu came to the throne, he too delayed in fulfilling his duty of establishing their cult.

One day a bat¹ appeared, with a burning leaf under its wing. Dropping the flaming leaf, he set all Abomey on fire. Tɛgbesu, in terror, left Abomey and established his capital at Kana to save himself from these malevolent spirits. However, they came to Kana to torment him and he said, "Since they are now also here, I may as well return to Abomey." Some time later, great numbers of these little folk, all with beards and with small whips in their hands, came to Abomey and drove out the people. They wanted to capture the King, but by leaving his hammock he was able to escape on foot, undetected. The people who had fled from the city went first to Xlanwa, and from there to Zadu. Everywhere there was hunger, for those who had planted maize reaped only stones.

At Abomey, a prince named Homenuvo, who suffered from guinea-worm, was forced to stay behind when the others fled. One day, the *txxsu*, who by now had doubled their numbers, broke down the door of his house, took him prisoner, and brought him to their chiefs who, headed by Zumadunu, were at their camp at the place where the temple to Zumadunu in Abomey now stands. Zumadunu had six eyes,

¹ Bats are thought to be emissaries of these "little people."

two in his forehead, two where the eyes normally are, and two in his chin. They brought the trussed prince before him, and Zumadunu, saying he was the son of Akaba, stated that he would destroy all Dahomey unless a cult for himself and the other dead like himself were started. The prince agreed to institute the cult, whereupon Zumadunu instructed him in the manner of worship of the ancestors and of many of the gods. Thus it was he who taught the Dahomeans to know how to perform the ceremony for the ancestors; how to bury people; how to call the *dokpwégǣ*, and what the duties of the *dokpwégǣ* are. It was he who told them of the gods of Sky and Earth and Thunder. In all, he gave to the Dahomeans seven hundred and sixty-six songs which are sung at the various ancestral ceremonies. Finally, he gave directions where he wished his temple constructed, and predicted everything that has since occurred in Dahomey; it was at this time that the eleven *txxsu* who were to be born to the royal family were foretold. This done, he dismissed Homenuvo, saying that if the King came eleven days from that date, at midnight, he would see him.

Homenuvo, his illness cured, went to see Tǣgbesu and the King, believing him, came to the place where Zumadunu was to be found at the time named. When he arrived, he heard the sound of gourd rattles, accompanying the singing of a chorus whose music could be heard more than one hundred kilometers away. Zumadunu gave Tǣgbesu seven rattles which it is said still exist, and instructed him in the sacred purposes for which each was to be used. One of them is still employed to call the Sky gods.¹ As he departed, Zumadunu gave the King eleven times three cauries and other sacred objects.

Thus King Tǣgbesu "established" the cult of the "little people." Tǣgbesu's mother, a woman of Adjā, who was a priestess of the Sky cult was put in charge of what Zumadunu had given her son, and the temples for the Sky gods were built just in front of the house of Tǣgbesu's mother, and the temple of Zumadunu in back of where she lived. Later, a group of "little people" returned and instructed the Dahomeans that every dead *txxsu* must have someone to represent him.

In the light of such a tradition, it is evident why Zumadunu is held in such great respect. The Dahomeans say "Zumadunu commands all," because it is by the head-priest of Zumadunu that a cult-initiate who has committed a crime is judged. It is also said of Zumadunu that if one who does not have his respect sacrifices to him, the sacrifice is disdained. Thus tradition tells how, when the French were conquering Dahomey and Behanzin, the King, was in hiding some seventy-five kilometers from Abomey, the Dahomeans one night brought a bullock as a sacrifice to Zumadunu to ask him to help them, for it was

¹ No information could be obtained concerning the uses to which the other six rattles are put.

believed that the French had succeeded because of the anger of Zumadunu. In the morning the offering had disappeared, but on the next day it was found at the door of Behanzin's hiding place. Zumadunu had refused to accept it. Another tale indicates why the power of Zumadunu is so feared:

In the time of King Glele a war was about to be declared on the people of Moko, a large Nago kingdom, and Zumadunu was asked to prosper the expedition. That night as Glele slept, he appeared and told the King not to go to war against that people, but to wait until the following year to attack them. When a year had passed, Glele again, in sleep, saw Zumadunu, who said that the time had now come to make war against the Moko. Zumadunu then instructed Glele not to arm his warriors, since he said that the "little people" would fight for them. Glele, not having enough confidence in his dream, and asking how it could be possible for a war to be carried on without arms, called his diviners. These men, however, said that the dream was a true one and, in accordance with it, Glele sent his army unarmed against the enemy. When the first shot was fired at his soldiers, a million "little people" appeared on the battle-field, and brought six Nago captives to every Dahomean soldier, and these were brought to Glele. When the King returned from the war, which lasted only a single day, he enlarged the temple of Zumadunu to show his gratitude, and offered many handsome gifts of money, cloths, and sacrificial animals to the deity and his priests.

As is recounted in the tale of Zumadunu's commandments to the Dahomeans, his temple is situated in Abomey behind the quarters of the present-day "mother" of Tɛgbesu, near the remains of what was the palace of this King. Two men are in charge of this structure, the chief-priest being under surveillance of a descendant of the man appointed at the time the temple was first built to see that this votary did not misuse or exceed his powers. Some of the most important ceremonies of the royal ancestral cult are held at this site every August. Near the entrance to the temple is a small thatched structure where, the heads of the bullocks sacrificed to Zumadunu are placed, and where, in May, the skulls of the animals constituting the previous year's offerings still reposed. The portico of the long building is roofed with thatch, and the overhanging eaves reach almost to the ground. The two guardians whose joint presence is required when visitors are admitted offered no explanation of the paintings on the walls, which, as Le Herissé, who figures some of these paintings,¹ indicated and as

¹ Plate XX. Le Herissé's reproductions, which are given in color, were later further checked by crayon drawings made from memory by a young member of the chief-priest's family.

Dahomeans later stated when these were discussed, depict incidents in the reigns of the Dahomean kings. The entire surface of its outer walls is spotted red and white, and this also is characteristic of all the *txoxu* temples, of which Abomey has one for the abnormally born creatures of each branch of the royal family.

Special rituals for other members of the *txodu* may also be considered. The importance of the *tshwiyô* is such that it would be strange did ceremonies which have for their purpose the worship of these sib founders not exist. As has been remarked, a temple for the *tshwiyô* is erected in each aggregate of compounds, though of these one temple, said to have been the first erected, and thought to contain the exhumed bones of the *tshwiyô*, is the most important. At the same time, this is true not only of the *tshwiyô*, but of all the ancestors, for in considering the manner in which a new compound or collectivity—or even a new sib—is formed, it has been seen how important it is that the resting place of the bones of the founder of each unit in Dahomean social organisation be carefully cared for, and how such a spot is sacred. Once a year, at the time of the “customs” for the ancestors, the *tshwiyô* is also feted. Yet in keeping with the sacredness of this being, and the secrecy which surrounds the mention of his name and the details of his life on earth as conceived by his descendants, the family never speak of this dance as one for their *tshwiyô*, but rather call it by the vague term of “a dance for the gods.”¹ All the siblings who belong to the various cult-groups which mark Dahomean religious life dance for their own deities, but one of the dancers is dressed differently, and dances differently from all the others, and this dancer impersonates the *tshwiyô*. Some of the rites for the *tshwiyô*, especially those of the royal sibs, are invested with as great ceremonialism, however as those of the Great Gods. Such *tshwiyô* have temples with which cult-houses are associated, as do the gods themselves, while their cult-practices are the same as those of the cult-groups of the “public” deities. Each cult-house is presided over by a chief-priest and his aides, and at stated periods novitiates are received, trained, and graduated as full-fledged members of the cult. A portion of one *tshwiyô* rite was witnessed in connection with a simple *txodu* ceremony. The dance took place in the country some kilometers from Abomey, along a bush-path off the road from that city to Tɛndji. The path itself guarded by an *azɛɛ* led to a village, in the heart of which was

¹ By “dance” is meant “ceremony,” since worship in Dahomey, as in all of West Africa, invariably entails dancing to the deity worshipped.

the dance-clearing. Not far from the center of this space was a large tree, about which the dancers circled. The fact, already indicated by informants, that a group dancing in honor of their *tshwíyó* do not mention this as such a dance, which, spoken of as "a dance for the gods," is participated in by all those of the family group who are worshippers of the "public" deities—the Sky, the Earth, and Thunder and the Sea—was true of this ceremony, for here the principal character was not even seen. To one side of the clearing, where the houses were located, sat the important men of the village; under the tree, facing them, were the drummers and singers. The costuming was elaborate, and the dancing spirited. When first seen, dancing for the Thunder gods was going on; the men flourished their ceremonial thunder-axes as they danced, while the women crouched as they came near, and the children among the spectators ran from them. Behind one of these men, or in front of him when she could dance there, was a woman who, with a round white cap worn on the side of her head, impersonated Avrskétè, a goddess of the Sea cult.¹ After this came group dancing, not unlike that of the *nesúxwè* cult, but more vigorous, since these were commoners; when this was finished, dancing for the Earth gods began. The men who were members of the Earth cult wore wide skirts over short breeches, on which red or black crosses were appliquéd. One of these men wore a round skull-cap, the cap of a chief, for the Earth is King. The priest, who wore a white cap, began to sing in a falsetto voice, the drums sounding an accompaniment. In this song he first called on the Sky gods, Mawú and Lísa, then on Xevioso, the god of Thunder, next on Sagbatá, the Earth, and finally on Hú, the Sea. He then danced, performing the whirling, leaping figures that characterize the worship of the Earth gods, and was later joined by others. This done, he sang once more an improvised song of ridicule which is the right of the Earth to compose, since a King has all rights. When this song was finished, however, there was a lull in the proceedings and, since there were indications that a portion of the ceremonial not open to public view was to begin, and etiquette demanded that visitors retire, further report of this rite cannot be made.

Another *tshwíyó* rite, which was described but not seen, may also be detailed. This occurs when, in the case of a newly-born child, the diviner announces that the *djotó*,² the "guardian" soul of the infant, is the spirit of the *tshwíyó* of the father's sib. Only when the child is

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 155–156.

² See below, vol. ii, pp. 234–235.

old enough to be "taken to the market," and the accompanying ceremony which must then take place has been performed, is the mother freed from her onerous responsibilities as "wife of the *tshwíyǒ*." The hair of such a child is not cut until this time, and during the period between the birth of her infant and his attaining this age the mother must keep all of her own hair which had been cut off. During this long interval, she may give nothing to her husband nor to any other man, nor may she receive anything from the hand of any man. Absolute continence is, of course, mandatory, for inasmuch as the soul of the child has been declared to be that of the founder of the sib, no living man would dare dispute a "wife" of this being with him.

For the ceremony of release from the *tshwíyǒ*, chickens, goats, cloths and other offerings must be on hand. The ritual begins at night. First the woman's hair is shaved; next a rite which frees her from the taboo of neither giving into nor receiving from the hand of a man is performed; while, finally, the wife is returned to her husband. For this ceremonial a mat which has been three days in the house of the *tshwíyǒ* is provided by the husband, and the chief-priest calls upon the mother and child to sit upon it. The woman holds a small jar containing some sacred relics of the founder, which the chief-priest takes from her, proclaiming her liberated from the ancestral spirit, and no longer subject to the taboos of a wife of the *tshwíyǒ*. His invocation is as follows:

"Those who people the mountain told us you were the wife of the *tshwíyǒ*. Those who came to draw water told us you were the wife of the *tshwíyǒ*. The creatures of the forest told us you were the wife of the *tshwíyǒ*. Those who go to the market told us you were the wife of the *tshwíyǒ*. Since we do not know the names of those who learned this on the mountain, you must this night go to inform the mountain that he in turn may tell all his inhabitants."

The "mountain" here, as in other ceremonies, is symbolized by a small hillock; its inhabitants are the ancient and powerful dead whose spirits reside there. The woman walks seven times about this hillock, while the priest, speaking "strong words," calls upon the "mountain" to tell all its inhabitants that the woman is free; as he leaves, he drops seven caury-shells, but does not look back. They now go to the well—"not a European-made well, but a spring"—and here the chief-priest pronounces the same words and goes through the same ceremonial—this time to apprise the *txxsu*, the abnormally born, and the *txvodu*, the deified family dead, of the woman's release. They then

go to the "forest"—a clump of bush perhaps several meters in circumference—where circling it seven times, the priest announces to all the gods who reside there and the *tshwíyó* of all other sibs, that this woman is free.

Now they return to the house of the woman, and the priest asks her whether she has told the market that she was the wife of the *tshwíyó*. She replies in the negative, and is asked her reason. She answers that the market is not inhabited by gods, but is a place where living beings are found, and that she had considered it preferable that the priest and the cult members of the *tshwíyó* take her to market the following day, so that all may see that she had remained faithful to the great ancestral spirit who is the father of her child. When she says this, the chief-priest replies,

"That is so, for during the time the great *tshwíyó* was with you, you have not behaved improperly. Tomorrow all will see the great honor that the *tshwíyó* has bestowed upon you, for the *tshwíyó* has said that when a woman has respected his commands, she must go to the market during the day and be honored, but if she has profaned them, she must go to the market at night and count her foot-steps with stones."

Since the ceremony begins late at night, this point is reached early in the morning. At this time, as the mother of the child is seated on the mat that has been magically treated, her hands turned downward toward the earth, the chief-priest and the cult-members come before her and say, "If you can truthfully say you have not sinned, we will take you to the market today." Three times they ask her, "Should we go?"

If the woman has had no physical contact with any man, each time she replies, "Yes."

After they have put a cloth over the mother's head and have shaved the head of the baby, the oldest cult member takes a rattle and begins a song to her own accompaniment.

"If you do not go to the market,
The spirit has said he will kill you.
See! We are going to the market,
For should we not go there
The god, your guardian spirit, will kill
Those he vowed to kill.
Yes, yes, we are going to the market.
If you have not spoken truthfully,
May your words be on your own head."

The child leads the way, with the mother following, while all who pass them praise the woman, and give her money. At the market, they go at once to the *aizǫ*, and there inform the spirit that the woman is free. After this they march seven times about the market place, returning to the house where the earlier portions of the ceremony have been enacted. That night the woman sleeps in the house of the *tshwiyǫ*, and only on the following night rejoins her husband.

If, however, a woman has violated the taboos by having contact with men subsequent to the birth of her child and before this ceremony, then when the questions concerning her abstention are put to her and her answer is in the negative, the entire ceremony must be repeated, since everything done up to the point of asking her whether or not she had profaned the *tshwiyǫ* had merely had as its purpose to free her from the supernatural spirit to which she has owed fidelity. The second ceremony begins the next night and parallels the first until the rites of taking the woman to the mountain, the forest and the spring are reached. At this point, without querying her as before, she is led directly to the market-place. There are few present and no songs are sung. At every step from her compound to the market *aizǫ*, she stoops to pick up a stone. Arrived there, they go to the shrine, and tell the *aizǫ* that this woman had sinned against her *tshwiyǫ*, and that, since the *aizǫ* is a more powerful spirit than the *tshwiyǫ*, the *aizǫ* must intercede for the sinner. Leaving the *aizǫ*, they go to the forest where the *tshwiyǫ* lives, and the chief-priest says,

"Aizǫ sent us to tell you that this woman has behaved badly, but that the fault is that of the stones that lie in the path. Even now, when this woman went to the market, her every step was obstructed by a stone, and, as there are many stones in the road, she could not walk straight toward her *tshwiyǫ*. Now we shall tell the mountain, the river, and the forest that you have pardoned your daughter."

After returning to the house of the ancestral spirit, where the ceremony is being held, they proceed to notify the "mountain," the well, and the "forest," that she has been pardoned. In the morning, the priest asks once more, "Apart from the sin for which the *tshwiyǫ* has pardoned you, are you blameless enough to go to the market?" The woman makes an affirmative answer three times, and the old woman, singing to the accompaniment of the rattle, leads the way to the market. In this case, however, the woman who had been unfaithful has no cloth on her head, and all who meet her know that she is not to be honored and they give her no gifts.

Though the mother is now released from her taboos, her child remains a person of special importance all his life. He is termed *yódljê* ("deity-protector") and, as one under the special tutelage of a powerful spirit, is sought out to impart his power; and pregnant women especially call on him to bless them. Such a person never carries a oad on his head, nor would a member of his family dare to offer him insult. The position has burdens as well as privileges, however, for a child born "of the *tshwíyó*" must observe the requirements of his position; thus, when desirous of marrying, the permission of his *djotó* must be sought in a ceremony not unlike the one which has been just described.

A final summary of the ancestral cult may now be given. All persons eventually become deified as *tvodu*, familial gods. If they are princes of the royal blood, or officers of the King, their spirits come into the cult of the princely dead, the *nesúxwè*. The dead of each sib are headed by the *tshwíyó*, under each of whom are found the souls of all the members of a given sib. Included in this number is Dambada Hwedo, the personification of the powerful unknown dead of the sib, the *aizê*, variously designated as the supernatural force that was the parent of the *tshwíyó* or as the impersonal power that holds a sib, as it holds a community or district together as a self-conscious group, and the powerful *txesú*, the souls of those abnormal individuals born to the wives of sib-members. Except for the members of the two sibs who do not deify their ancestors but worship only the Sky gods, all Dahomeans participate in this cult. For some, the worship of ancestors may be their only form of religious affiliation, as in the case of princes, who may be members of no religious cult-groups. Whether of royal blood or commoner, however, the importance of the ancestral cult is paramount. In the life of every Dahomean, his ancestors stand between him and the gods who personify the forces of the universe that periodically threaten him with destruction. As an integral part of social organisation, on the one hand, and of religious expression, on the other, the respect and worship of the ancestors may then be thought of as one of the great unifying forces that, for the Dahomean, give meaning and logic to life.

Chapter XIII

NON-RELATIONSHIP GROUPINGS

It is a truism that if a well-rounded concept of any society is to be attained, two aspects of its social organisation must be considered, the one based on blood relationship, the other on that of free association. The most fundamental of these groupings, and the most immediate, is one most neglected by anthropologists—friendship.¹ Yet in its institutionalized form, it is in Dahomey a basic element in the social structure, and as such must claim initial place in this chapter.²

Everyone in Dahomey, man or woman, is said to have three friends. These three friends occupy a place of peculiar importance in the life of the Dahomean man or woman. The first friend is called *xɛntɔ daxò* (friend-eldest); the second, whose name is derived from an incident of the funeral ceremony (in which the ritual of the three friends is of great importance), is called *xɔli-si-mɛ* (house-against-stand), "he who stands against the wall"; the third, *xɛntɔ gbo kɛ tɛ* (friend-threshold-on), "the friend who stands on the threshold." To the first friend is given complete confidence, for the essence of this relationship is that it must be of complete trust. To the second friend one tells half of what one knows; the third, as it is said, "stands at the threshold and hears what he can."

It is a difficult matter of field technique to ascertain whether or not this institution of the first friend is actually as general as it is said to be by many Dahomeans. The relationship is a sentimental one, and,

¹ The institution of the best friend may not only be the reflection of a deep-seated pattern of African society, but may be much more widely spread. Since its discovery in Dahomey was published (Herskovits III), Driberg has described a similar configuration as it occurs in East Africa, and Mandelbaum has found it among North American Indians.

² Hazoumé, in his Memoir which appeared while the present work was in press, discusses the institution of the best friend in Dahomey in terms of blood-brotherhood. Though attempts were made during the field-work described here to find a blood pact in connection with institutionalized friendship, all suggestions of such an association were unconfirmed by the Dahomeans with whom the matter was discussed. However, as will be seen below (p. 250), the blood-pact was found to exist as a part of the ritual of mutual self-help societies.

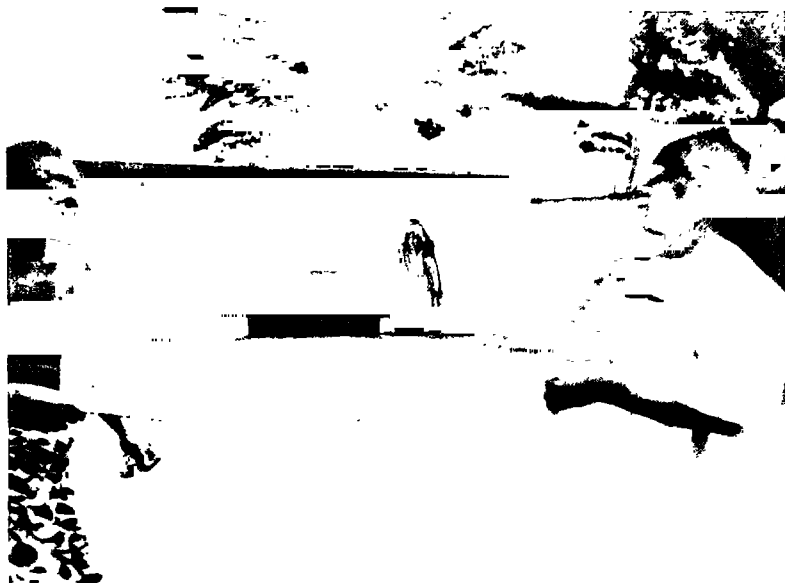
like most people who live in societies where there is a large element of careful calculation based on mutual suspicion, sentimentality such as is represented by this type of deep friendship is to be expected. This is perhaps why Dahomeans enjoy expanding on the importance of a man's best friend, and stress the feeling of unqualified confidence and inner ease between two best friends. Everyone, man or woman, it is said, must have a best friend, and such a friend may fill this rôle for none other. Yet it is somewhat difficult to reconcile such a principle with the statement that when one's best friend dies, the second friend becomes the first, the third becomes the second, and a new third friend is selected; and when the inquiry is pressed whether such a practice would not make the second friend *xɛntɔ daxò* to two persons at one time, the Dahomean shrugs his shoulders and says, "These things are arranged." Moreover, best friends sometimes hold for one another the character of an institutionalized relationship rather than one that is prompted by affection. For while the best friend is, in most instances, a real comrade, and while having him as a confidant undoubtedly brings psychological release to his friend, yet the fact that it is essential, if the ritual of death is to be properly carried out, that a person have a best friend to perform certain services and to give prescribed sacrifices sometimes brings it about that the "friendship" is a conventionalized affair, and cases have been reported where a man has chosen his own son as a best friend. In spite of instances of this kind, and despite any differences between the system as ideally described and as it is actually operative, the fact remains that this institution of the best friend is of great importance for most Dahomeans, and is a real factor in their daily life. Thus the reason that it is possible to present as detailed a catalogue and as many examples of Dahomean charms as is given below is because of the fact that the best friend of one member of the native staff of the field-party happened to be a maker of charms.¹ When the nature of the work being done and the integrity of those doing it had been vouched for by his friend, no other recommendation was necessary.²

The tale which follows indicates the extent to which this feeling concerning the best friend is deeply lodged in Dahomean psychology and traditional belief:

There once lived a man who was both a renowned hunter and a successful farmer. One day, his best friend came to him and asked him

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 263 ff.

² For other aspects of the best friend relationship, see above, pp. 88 ff., and pp. 361-362 below.



a) Scene within an Abomey compound, headquarters of the local *egun* society.
The masked figure, after being whipped by the initiates, is seen retreating through the doorway.



b) "Hunters of the night" in costume at Whydah.



Dahomean non-secret society banners.

to help him work his field. The hunter consented to come on the day named. Soon afterwards the diviner who consulted Fate for him also came and asked if he would help work his field. The hunter again consented, though the day was the same as he had set to help his friend. Later, his father-in-law came with a request that he help him work his fields. The hunter agreed once more, and again the day named was the same as that of his best friend and his diviner.

When the appointed day arrived the hunter rose early, took his gun and went to the bush to hunt. He hunted for a long time, *ka ka ka* . . . Then he shot at an animal, and when it fell, he did not even go to see if he had killed it. He left at once, and went to his father-in-law's field. When he arrived there he said to his father-in-law, "Look, my diviner told me to come this day and help him cultivate his field and so did my best friend. Now when I knew this, I went hunting that I might kill an antelope for you, my father-in-law. But when I shot, I shot at a man." At once the father-in-law replied, "I don't want to hear about this! I don't want to hear anything about it! You killed one of the King's men, and now you want to hide here? I don't want to hear anything about it!"

So the hunter left and went to the field of the diviner. He said, "Here I am. You commanded me to work in your field today. My father-in-law told me to work in his field today, too, and my best friend asked me to work in his field. I wanted to kill an antelope for you, but when I shot I killed a man." The diviner said, "Ah, we can have nothing more to do with each other. When you visited me in the past you gave me money and I told you your destiny. Today you killed a man belonging to the King, and now you come here to hide. Go! You cannot hide in my house!"

Now the hunter went to his best friend and said to him, "My friend, your day came. But my father-in-law also asked me to work his field today, and my diviner fixed the same day for me to help him in his field. I wanted to kill an antelope for you so that you might cook it for the people who will come to work in your field. But, as I shot at it, I shot a man." His friend said, "What? And did you tell anyone that you killed a man?" The hunter answered him, he said, "No, I told no one." So the friend took his hoe, and said, "All right. Let us go and bury him."

So they went to the bush. The hunter's friend did not even ask him where he killed the man, but he began to dig a grave. When he finished the grave he said, "I have finished digging the grave. Let us go where the man lies." But the hunter said, "No, I don't want to go. But there is the place where I killed the man." So the friend went and when he came there, he hunted through the bush and saw a dead antelope. Then the hunter said to him, "In the life of Mawú, I wanted to know which of the three—friend, father-in-law, diviner—one could follow until death." Then he said, "I told this to my father-in-law. I told this to the diviner. When I went to my father-in-law he did not even let me tell him what had happened. He said he did not

want to hear anything about the matter. He said I must go away at once. The same thing happened with my diviner."

That is why, in the life of man, when the choice must be made between father-in-law, diviner, or best friend, a man must always be closest to the best friend. The others a man may leave to one side, but the best friend of a man is first.

We may now consider those larger non-relationship groupings, of the types more conventionally recognized as falling into such a classification, as these are manifest in Dahomey. "Associations," as they have been aptly termed,¹ have too often been neglected because of an overshadowing interest in sib organisation and totemism, or because of absorption in the problems of relationship terminology, and the way in which social convention may warp biological fact. It may be said, however, that students of social organisation in African societies have sinned least in over-emphasis of biological as against non-biological groupings, for here the significance of age-groups and secret societies as religious, educational, political and disciplinary organisations has been so apparent that even the reports of casual travellers contain references to them. With this emphasis in the literature of the rôle in Africa of the non-relationship groupings, and particularly since Dahomey lies at the center of a region which is described as honey-combed with secret societies, one object of this research was to ascertain the details of organisation and the types of function of such groupings. It will be readily recalled that immediately west of Dahomey, the linguistically related Ewe peoples have been credited by Spieth and Westermann with being dominated by the Yehwe secret society. Directly eastward, particularly among the Nigerian Oyo and Egba folk, the Egungun and Oro secret organisations are found most prominently, and there are many others. What, then, of Dahomey?

As far as could be ascertained, both from direct observation of the lives of the people, and through the questioning of informants, the answer to this query must, in the main, be negative. For at the very inception of work in the field, the intention was of course to follow up the leads of those students of the Ewe whose published accounts of the secret religious organisation among those people made available data which should be directly comparable to Dahomean findings, especially since these writings had indicated that the origin of this society was to be traced to Dahomey. Investigation in the field, however, disclosed that the data these students present essentially describe the organi-

¹ H. Schurtz, *Altersklassen und Männerbünde*.

sation and practices of the Dahomean religious cult-groups, as will be evident when these are later considered. Now in a very restricted measure, indeed, the associations of those who worship given deities might be termed *secret societies*; that is, the members have in common certain knowledge which is hidden to the uninitiate, this information being imparted to them during a period of seclusion and training which is to be regarded as a time of initiation. But in the sense that members of the Poro societies in Sierra Leone, or the Leopard societies in the Congo, or of the Egungun or Oro and other secret associations of Nigeria, masked and unknown, exercise vengeance on wrong-doers and otherwise terrorize the non-initiate, these religious cult-groups must emphatically be regarded as falling in a different category. As for the word *yehwe* itself, it was seen, and will be noticed again when religious terminology is discussed, that it is merely a synonym for the term *vodu*, "deity." Furthermore, in probing the possible existence of secret societies in Dahomey, no indications could be obtained from priests, initiates, or laity that there was anything but autonomy within each of the various cult groups, for the possibility had to be taken into account that the Yehwe society, as described for Togoland, might perhaps be a super-organisation comprising initiates of all cult-groups. The only occasions when the members of the various religious cults unite for action is when a priest or cult-member has suffered insult in a manner forbidden to a cult-member, or when the ceremonies for the burial of an initiate are to be performed. Otherwise each group, though having its secrets, merely comprises the worshippers of a given god. They never mask, the identity of the members is known, the secrets are religious secrets, and the duties entailed are those that devolve upon them as worshippers of their gods.¹

Eliminating, then, the existence of a Yehwe secret society, what may be said to be the character of the non-relationship "associations" in Dahomey? To answer this query, it is necessary to differentiate between three types of such groupings. Most widely spread, comprising the greatest number of members and most typically Dahomean are the "social," non-secret societies. These meet for the pleasure the members find in mutual association, for arranging for and officiating at social dances, and, most important of all, to function as mutual-aid insurance societies to help the members meet the burdensome expenses of

¹ These points, merely touched on here, are developed fully below, vol. ii, pp. 190-194, where, in discussing religious concepts, the Dahomean significance of the word *yehwe* is considered in the light of the Togoland data.

marriages and funerals. Organisations of an economic character, which have been described,¹ may be considered a sub-type of this form, though these have few social features and are really work societies. The second and third types of "associations" are, strictly speaking, not Dahomean, but are importations from the East. In the second group must be included the societies which are indisputably secret in character but which existed in the days of the Kings only on the periphery of the kingdom where the power of the Dahomean King was not felt in its full force, or where persons of Dahomean stock were not under the rule of the Aladaxónù Kings, as in Porto Novo, or in the region east of Zagnanado. If Whydah may be excepted, no associations of this character, however, exist or existed on the western borders of the kingdom of Dahomey, toward the region occupied by the Ewe speaking tribes of Togoland. The third category of societies, also secret, represent recent importations from Nigeria, and take on all the characteristics as well as the names of the Nigerian secret societies. These have developed in the city of Abomey during the last decade. Certain societies, found at the fringe of the Dahomean kingdom, such as those of Porto Novo, have spread to Abomey only since the downfall of native control.

Descriptions of these three types of societies may begin with the last, reserving the most indigenous forms for final consideration. In Abomey, at the present time, the Oro and Ègù societies of Nigeria, and the Zągbwétò and Bwèligèdè of Porto Novo, are all represented. According to several informants there are three Ègù groups in the city, one Oro, and many of the last two. The Oro and Ègù, like their Nigerian counterparts, depend on the power of the dead for their spiritual force and French-speaking Dahomeans, in discussing these societies, refer to them always as the *revenantes*, the ghosts. As in Nigeria, it is the Ègù which "plays," while the Oro never appears in public; similarly, the Oro is the most feared. It was impossible to obtain details concerning this society, except that it has only appeared in Abomey within the last four or five years, that its membership comprises a very few elderly persons of wealth, but not of the traditionally powerful Dahomean groups. No princes belong to the Oro, nor as yet do any members of the chiefs' families who identify themselves closely with the monarchy of the old regime. It is said that the Oro, having obtained their supernatural power from the parent Nigerian society, are not loathe to use this power, and among the rank and file of Dahomeans fear exists

¹ See above, Ch. IV.

of this new phenomenon which has come into their lives as a result of the overthrow of the native system of government.

The Ègù is as closely related to its parent Nigerian society as is the Òrò. It probably existed from early times in eastern Dahomey, and has been present in Abomey for the last fifteen or twenty years. The chiefs, though they are not reconciled to it, are preparing to recognize it as a factor to be taken into account as soon as the Ègù groups become large and powerful. Already, however, in some conflict between a chief and a man who is known to be a member of the Ègù, more than common prudence is exercised by the chief's representatives in settling the dispute, lest the members of the commoner's group seek redress in his behalf.

Two ceremonies of the Ègù, one private, and one public, were observed. It was chance that, while walking along a road, singing and drumming were heard inside a nearby compound, and that an informant who had recorded various types of songs on the phonograph and who resided in this compound, made it possible to "see the ghosts." An interpreter, a member of the royal family, who was present at the time, showed great distaste for the entire proceeding, yet it was not without significance that the customary gift offered by the visitor who watches a Dahomean ceremonial was this time matched by the interpreter, something never before done by him when indigenous Dahomean rites of any type were witnessed. In the court-yard, the residents of the compound sat against the wall, while the women watched the ceremony through doors and windows, but did not venture into the open. At the end farthest from the entrance where another door gave into an interior court, crouched a man, blind-folded and on all fours, his back bare, being whipped by the men who surrounded him. A few moments after the entrance of the visitors, however, he was taken away. Those with him also disappeared, to issue forth a short time later from the same doorway, accompanied by a figure in the typical dress of the Nigerian Ègù dancers, a suit of coarsely woven material such as is to be seen during any Nigerian Ègù play covering his head and body, but the mesh of his suit making it possible for him to see his way about. He emitted sounds that may best be characterized as growls, and what he said was not interpreted; but the singer who was in charge of the ceremonies merely stated that he was giving his greetings, and that he did not speak Fɔ̀ but Nago, the Yoruban language. The men with whips were careful to keep between the masked one and the spectators and when, from time to time, the figure made a pass at

those who were watching, the men with whips beat him back vigorously, though not before all the Dahomean non-members had hastily retired. After dancing in the courtyard for a time, the Egu figure departed, going out through the same doorway by which he had entered, whereupon it was indicated that it was time for visitors to leave.

The second occasion on which the Egu were observed was at the performance of a public "play." Drums were heard in the street, and three masked figures, preceded by about fifty singing women, a drummer, and men with whips came into sight on their way to the market-place. They remained there for several hours before they returned to a cleared dancing-space, in front of the compound where the previous rite had been witnessed.¹ The play, which continued all afternoon until darkness put an end to the dancing, was not confined to the three masked figures, for the attendants would from time to time leap into the cleared space and there dance to the music of drums and of songs sung by the women. One of the masked figures carried a machete, the second a club, and a third a bit of skin to which feathers had been fastened. These three often rushed at the crowd, weapons in hand, and all fell back pell-mell, while the men with whips vigorously plied their instruments until the masked dancer was forced back into the open space. Denuded bamboo branches were laid end to end about the cleared space, and the spirits of the dead represented by the masked figures were required to remain in the enclosure, though they broke loose from time to time, as has been noted.

It is obvious, from the above, that the Egu cult in Abomey has been strikingly assimilated to the Dahomean patterns of ritual observance. It will be recalled that in Nigeria, the Egungun chiefly constitute a disciplinary society, and that their "plays" are strikingly different from the dance described, attended by throngs of people who watch the gyrations of the returned "spirits of the dead." In Nigeria, the Egungun go masked about the streets; there are no attendants for the masked figures, who themselves carry whips, chastise those whom they have been sent to punish, or any others who do not show them the proper respect. One of the outstanding characteristics of the Egungun in Nigeria is the fact that women are strictly prohibited from having

¹ The comments of two or three members of the royal family who watched this procession was again indicative of their attitude toward the Egu. One of them said, "Why should we have them here, when we have our own *tovody*?" The menace of this society to the Dahomean ancestral cult and through this to the control exercised by the royal sib can be seen from such a remark to be something clearly realized by the members of the Dahomean ruling caste.

any contact with the masked figure; indeed, since for a woman to see any part of the body of a masked dancer meant death for her as well as for the dancer, the contrast of the Abomey *Eḡu* ceremony with the Nigerian *Egungun* customs is apparent at once. The importance of women as singers of songs is a Dahomean innovation; the dancing, first in the market-place and then in the cleared space in front of the compound, is another. The "bamboos" within which the *Eḡu* are supposed to be confined is a translation of the manner in which Dahomean royalty was segregated from the populace in terms of the *Eḡu* cult. In Abomey it is not the *Eḡu* who carry whips, but those who are without masks; as a matter of fact, it seemed as though these latter were guards to prevent the "ghosts" from wreaking vengeance on innocent bystanders, rather than helpers of the spirits. On the other hand, the costuming, and, it is said, many of the songs, are Nigerian. Certainly the concept of the *Eḡu* as a power emanating from the spirits of the dead has been taken over directly from Nigeria. Finally, in Dahomey, the *Eḡu* cult-houses contain charms whose magic properties are available at a price to believers who are not members, as well as to the members themselves. One such charm had properties believed to cause the rains to end at the proper time.

Of the coastal secret societies there is little public evidence in Abomey. Only one manifestation of their activities was encountered. From time to time, in the dead of night, one was awakened by a peculiar low whistle which was followed by rapping as though it were made by a stick beaten on a wooden block. The strokes were slow at first, but became gradually faster and faster in rhythm, until they came to a sudden stop. Usually, from some more distant place, these were echoed by another series of beats. When on the following mornings questions were asked concerning them, the reply invariably came that these sounds were made by watchmen who guarded houses and shops against thieves, since, by signalling in this manner, they were able to frighten off possible malefactors. What was not known at the time was that the coastal societies perform just this function. Hence on these occasions, as on those other rare ones when it was possible to hear groups of men singing in the night, these represented the operations of the local chapters of such groups.

The coastal societies, concerning which information was obtained, are the *Zḡgbwétḡ*,¹ the *Bweligedḡ*, and the *Djeórù*. The first is

¹ The only description of this society to be encountered in the literature is that of Foá, pp. 232ff. who details the underlying sanctions, the functions and the "plays" of this society in Porto Novo.

variously called "Hunters of the night," or "Sea-birds." This latter appellation is derived from the fact that their "chief," Sode, is believed to live in the sea, as is indicated by the following Zangbwétô song:

Sode comes, Sode comes,
The Zangbwétô cry out, "Heed ye!"
Sode comes from his place in the sea.

The second society is termed "Those who roll on the earth," the third being "Those who eat the night." The principal function of all three is to act as police, and they are strongest in the city of their origin, Porto Novo, where they still have their principal seat. At the present time, it was said, they are employed by the merchants of Dahomean cities to act as guards, particularly to prevent thieving.¹ The first of the societies listed has the largest membership, but the second is the most powerful, and more cruel in its punishment of evil-doers. Like the Nigerian societies, they strike terror by means of masked figures who, from time to time, perform in public. Among the Zangbwétô, there are three categories of membership. A young man enters as a *zangbwétôvi*, "a child of the society." After his initiation he becomes a *zangbwétô*, a full-fledged member, and if eventually he is elected to chieftainship, he is named as a *zangqê*, a "chief of the night." Though details of initiation could not be obtained, it was learned that an assessment is levied on all candidates, and that the rites of initiation entail much beating, especially if the candidate is young and head-strong, or does not respond readily to instruction. The group of men who bear the title of *zangqê* actually judge the culprits brought in by the members. When such a one is apprehended, he is first tied and whipped in the Dahomean fashion, hands and feet together, bared back taut so that the lashes falling on it will cut more deeply. After this, he is taken before the *zangqê*. A Zangbwétô song, which was recorded, tells the plea of one who has been accused by the society:

O hunter, I have not stolen.
Do not strike me!
My father will accuse you, if you do.
My brothers will accuse you, if you do.

If necessary, the *zangqê* in the olden days brought the culprit before the secular chiefs—at the present time, he is summoned before the court and a charge is preferred against him. It is also said that the society is not beyond taking revenge on a wealthy man of the community who

¹ This was apparently also true in the time of Foá.

does not contribute to its exchequer. This would ordinarily take the form of destruction of some property belonging to him. In the case of the Bwɛligɛdɛ, an account of the internal organisation of which was not obtained, punishment for misdeeds is by death, which always occurs at night. The membership of this society is kept strictly secret and, when acting in official capacity, those who belong to it go about naked. Women are not permitted to see them at such times, and the cry "*Agó! Agó!*" is called out as a warning that such a one is nearby. No details of the organisation or functioning of the Porto Novo Djeŋrũ society could be obtained in Whydah, where these data were collected. It was said, however, in discussing these three, that only the Zangbwétô have a shrine where the members worship, and where the sacred rites of the group are performed.

No public display by the latter of these two societies was witnessed, but a performance by the Whydah Zangbwétô, which took place the night of July fourteenth, was observed. The members of the society, with gongs and rattles to accompany their songs, and with two masked members, paraded through the streets. From time to time the group stopped, and the masked figures danced and performed feats of magic. The costume of each of these dancers consisted of a horned head-piece, carved in the shape of a stylised human face, which was set on top of the head, and to the rim of which long strands of raffia were attached. These completely hid the body and legs of the performer, so that nothing but this tall moving mass could be seen. Since these figures always "play" at night, the indistinctness with which they are seen lends awe to their performance. The dancer is guided in his movements by his fellow members who, unmasked, whisper directions from time to time. A part of the "play," which has as its purpose the demonstration that these figures are actuated by spirits and not by human beings, involved leaving one of the costumes on the ground untenanted. This is done by two of the masks coming close together, and settling on the ground. After some play acting, one draws away from the other, the moving figure now sheltering two dancers. While this distracts the attention of the spectators, a member of the society under cover of the darkness enters the collapsed raffia structure lying on the ground, and soon the startled onlookers see the other figure again moving toward them.¹

¹ When it was suggested to a native whose father was an important *zɛngɛ* that a powerful flashlight might illumine to advantage the collapsed figure, he showed great consternation, and made the point most emphatically that the spirits have special aversion to lights.

We may now turn to a consideration of the typical Dahomean society, a non-secret group organized for social or economic mutual-aid. Of the social type some are local, and others more widely distributed, the latter possessing a few "secrets." The first form is organized by a group of young men—sometimes women are included—who have grown up together and have known each other from childhood. Mingling their blood, and making preliminary vows of blood brotherhood, they agree upon a series of mutual obligations of the following nature: When the father or mother of one of them dies, or when a considerable monetary loss is sustained by a member, or in the event that one of them falls ill, each is to contribute a certain sum to aid him. In other words, each party to the pact agrees to aid the others not in excess of a stipulated sum, in the event of the occurrence of certain previously designated contingencies. Membership in such societies is customarily limited to those who swear this blood bond, the generic term applied to them being *gbě*, although they are also known as *adodumede* ("hand-give-other"). A banner is devised of white cloth on which designs are applied indicative of the occupations and talents of the members, to be displayed when they appear in public, and a drum is bought to play for their dances. A *gbé* has four officers, three of whom are generally known to everyone, and a fourth, an "investigator," whose identity is concealed. The first, who is chief of the *gbě*, is termed the *gbéga*, the next in rank, a sub-chief, is called *azogloga*, while the third is treasurer, who is named *akwẹkplito* ("money-gather-person"). The fourth official, the confidential agent of the chief, is entitled *lẹgèdè*. His duty is to gather information concerning the status and activities of the members, and, since no one knows who he is, it is possible for him to get a fairly accurate picture of conditions. At the end of each month a report is made to the three officials, who may then openly judge any case brought before them by members of the society on the basis of the information their confidential reporter has given them. Such information chiefly concerns disputes among members over money or women. In societies having women members, a woman is often selected for this duty, recognition being given to women's special gifts for gossip, and their power over men. An organisation of this type is usually headed by the one who had been the moving spirit in its formation, who takes the title of *gbéga*. Once formed, any man who is unable to make his contribution when called upon is advanced the necessary funds by the *gbéga* from the common treasury, and he repays this money later when he is in a position to do so.

A description of the manner in which a *gbě* actually functions on one of the occasions when it is called—at the funeral of a member's parent-in-law, as an example—will serve to illustrate its importance in the lives of Dahomeans.¹ Sons- and daughters-in-law of the dead play an important rôle in the display of wealth which holds so valued a place at funerals. On the morning after the actual interment of the body, each man married or betrothed to a daughter of the dead brings his *gbě* to aid him in making the gifts which the occasion demands.² At this time, when any eulogy that the son-in-law or fiancé wishes to pronounce over the dead is said, his gifts are presented. These gifts, consisting of a piece of figured cloth, "as fine as can be found," a piece of black cloth "in silk or velvet," together with money—a few hundred francs or more, if one is wealthy, or whatever a man can afford to give, if he is not so well-to-do—are presented to a man's wife or his future wife. It is highly desirable that these gifts represent the larger rather than the smaller amounts. The first cloth given, to "cover the stomach," a woman wears for three months after she has received it, thus showing that her parent has recently died. The second (black) cloth also has as its purpose to provide her with a proper mourning costume. After he has proffered these two cloths, the man turns to the members of his society who are gathered behind him and says, "Now I am on my way. Push me!" This is the time when the fellow-members of his society must give the amounts agreed upon when the society was formed, and these sums, plus what a man's friends and relatives who are not members of his society may give, furnish the "push." The total amount is counted, announced by the crier, and given to the doner's wife or future wife, who keeps it for herself.

She, in her turn, has seen to it that her society, and friends not of her society are present, and these present her with many bottles of beverages which she gives her husband or fiancé, asking him to give them to his friends. She gives him a large man's cloth, "so that you will not feel the cold of the night," and she also adds a sum of money with which to "wash the throats" of those friends who had helped her hus-

¹ See pp. 384-385 for the full setting of the proceedings described here.

² This is one of the reasons why it is of great importance for an individual to belong to a society, for sons-in-law compete among themselves, as do daughters-in-law, to show how lavish a display each can make at this time, and if a man has no society to support him, then, when the time comes, he will have only his brothers and such friends as he can find for support, while the other sons-in-law will be able to draw on the large numbers of persons who compose some of these mutual-aid associations.

band to discharge his obligations at her parent's funeral. She then turns to her society, and in turn asks them to "push" her. The sum given is turned over by her to her husband. As this first couple give way to other pairs of daughters and sons-in-law of the dead, the ceremony develops into a contest between the sons-in-law to see who can make the greatest contribution. If a man sees his contribution is being exceeded, he calls upon the fellow-members of his *gbě* to increase their gifts, and because of the point of honor involved, usually they do this, while at the same time the man's own donation is increased. The money given to a woman on these occasions is for herself, that which she gives to the husband is turned over to the *dòkpwe* he has brought to assist at the funeral as singers, and players of the special funerary drums.¹

Concerning the larger *gbě*, only a vague description was obtained, for these apparently manifest an element of secrecy that perhaps marks them as a post-conquest phenomenon. According to one account, the number of members belonging to one of these often runs into the hundreds, and there are some which, extending their membership outside the confines of Dahomey into Togoland and Nigeria, may have over a thousand persons affiliated with them. It is said that a man who wishes to join such a society is introduced by someone already a member, after which he is put on probation for a period of years. Final entrance into the society is achieved when a man is young and the initiation, coming after the period of trial, is secretly held at night. The members identify one another by the use of signs known only to them. One society of this kind, to which an informant belonged, was organized twenty-seven years ago, and holds its initiations once every three years.

When the head of a *gbě* dies, the society itself usually disbands. The group wait for a period of time, perhaps a year, before any move is made to reorganize it, but apparently someone eventually takes the lead, and it is reorganized. Some of the old members may not care to join the new *gbě*; those who remain, however, reorganize it under the new head with new officers and perhaps new members. When an ordinary member dies, each of his fellows gives two yards of cloth which they sew together to make a cloth of striking length in which their comrade is buried. If the dead man belonged to one of the more widely distributed societies, it is said that a cloth sometimes three kilometers in length might be bought with the contributions, though in

¹ See pp. 368ff.

assessing this statement one must have due regard for the hyperbole with which the Dahomean is accustomed to couch the descriptions of his own activities.¹ However, where there are many members of a society, the contributions are often divided, one part going to help defray the expenses of the funeral, the other to be given to the heir of the deceased. It is also customary in some societies to summon the eldest son of the deceased member and to make him a junior member of his father's *gbě*, if he wishes to join.

The second sub-type of indigenous Dahomean society is known as *sò*. A group of this kind is organized for cooperative work, and one of its aims is to give mutual aid in cultivating the fields of the members. This does not mean that it conflicts with the institution of the *dókpwè*, for any number of men may agree to help each other, provided only that if they number more than four, they obtain permission of their *dókpwégã* to do communal labor. Therefore, when the members of a cooperative society of this kind wish to help one of their number till his fields, they ask a *dókpwégã* to preside over the work. It is understood, however, that even though he does direct this work, it is not a *dókpwè*, but a *sò* that is performing. If a man who belongs to such a society falls ill, then the head of the group authorizes the other members to go and work for the sick man, and in such a case the workers provide their own food. Such societies resemble the *gbě* in that they also provide insurance against emergency drains on the resources of a member. Dues are paid, and an agreement is reached as to how much is to be given when a father, or mother, or other relative of one of the members, dies. At the death of a member himself, the *sò* come with their banner to take charge of the body before the *dókpwè* arrives, and if the man who has died was poor and the usual contributions agreed upon are insufficient to take care of the burial, or if his children are left destitute, the head of the society orders an extra assessment on the surviving members to meet these needs. This phenomenon, however, characterizes both types of societies.

These cooperative work-groups may be concerned with other occupations than farming, however. Thus in the discussion of economic life, it has been noted how the blacksmiths, the weavers, the

¹ That cloths of such dimensions are not unknown to Dahomean tradition is evident from descriptions of the "King's patchwork cloth," given by Duncan and those who visited Dahomey after him. Duncan's account may be quoted here (vol. i, p. 264): "This day he also showed me a very singular piece of patchwork, composed of pieces of cloth from every part of the world where cloth is manufactured. It was of all colors, and was six hundred yards long by two yards wide."

pottery, and those of kindred occupation are closely organized.¹ In each case there is a *sògq* who directs the activities of the *sò*, and who sees to it that each member receives fair treatment. Should a man default after he had profited from the help of others and not give his own aid when called on, the *sògq* institutes an inquiry concerning the money he had received from his fellows. Thus, in the instance of a weaver who had given yarn to one of his associates, and this associate had sold the cloth and profited, but when the time came to reciprocate had not given what was expected of him, the *sògq* would take action. This would consist of seizing the property of the defaulter, including any of his animals that might be attached and sold. If the culprit had nothing to attach, he would be deprived of his membership in the society, and a complaint would be lodged against him with authorities; in the olden days, it would have been a matter to be taken before the King.

The *gbě* organized as mutual-insurance groups have also women members, but these are usually "free" women—girls born of rich mothers, or princesses—who as property owners, build their own compounds, and who, when they desire a man, call him to them. Before the conquest, such women often achieved a considerable measure of political power, and had many persons under their control. Part of this power was derived from the free sexual life they lived, because, since they received many notables, they were in a position to influence the decisions of these men.² It was thus possible for women who had such intimate relationships with men in power to make or mar the career of a chief, and hence it is not surprising that their membership in a society was welcome. Married women with means of their own are also found as members of such societies, but in their cases it is required that their husbands also be members.

Societies exclusively for women do, however, also exist. There are numerous ways of organizing them, but in their structure and function they parallel other of the indigenous Dahomean types. That is, a mutual blood-bond is established between the members, there is an initiation, dues are paid, and they carry the usual mutual-aid and insurance features. It is said that these women's societies are often richer than those of the men. According to the customary pattern, these groups have special songs which they sing when they appear in

¹ See above, pp. 75-77.

² Forbes (vol. ii, p. 84), recounts how the attentions of a princess were directed toward him.

public. Their songs are accompanied by gongs and rattles, and by a sound made by beating the chest with the open hand or clenched fist, but, unlike the male *gbě*, drums are not employed. There are also many songs of "allusion"—of the type sung in the market-places—which these organisations of women possess, and these are not too rarely directed against men. Tradition tells that in the days of King Glele, some of the husbands whose wives frequently absented themselves from home while attending these meetings forbade their attendance. Through the influence of the "free" women, who consorted with high officials, these husbands were summoned before the King, and, after a public hearing, it was decreed that women should have the right to membership in as many *gbě* as they could afford.

Before concluding the discussion of non-kinship associations, the results of the enquiry into the existence of age-classes so prevalent in many regions of Africa, must be indicated. In this, as in the instance of secret societies of an indigenous character, the evidence is negative. While it is true that women who go through the educational training in the techniques of sex¹ are bound by the intimacy of having shared these experiences together during an extended learning period, this feeling is not institutionally crystallized into a system of age-grades. The phenomenon, therefore, does not give rise to regimented activities, with which rank and status are associated, but rather to deep-rooted personal friendships. Similarly, the men who "share the heat of the knife" as members of the same circumcision group often remain close friends.² At times, if one of the group has initiative, they may form a society, a *gbě*, such as has been described, but this in no sense implies the classification of persons by age in the manner which characterizes East African cultures, for example. The tradition is non-existent in Dahomey that a man, together with others of his own years, must move as a member of his age-group from one social situation to the next merely because of the fact that he and his fellows have advanced in years. Rather, in the case of men as of women, not age but friendship is stressed both in the thinking of the individual Dahomean and in the stamp of institutionalisation imposed by Dahomean culture.

The reason for the absence of age-classes in Dahomey is not difficult to understand when it is realized that there is no place for them in the logic of Dahomean culture. The closest group affiliation the Dahomean feels is not with men of his own age, but with men of his own sib.

¹ See below, pp. 282-283.

² See below, p. 299.

Furthermore, such cooperative groups as do exist cut across age lines, instead of being confined to any one age level. Thus, in the case of the *dókpwe*, although these organisations are nominally termed groups of young men, it has been seen how the term really applies to all men, as explained in the saying, "Every man is *dókpwe*, for who will admit he is no longer young!" Indeed, after the inquiry into the question of age-classes as pertaining to Dahomey had demonstrated their absence, it was not without interest to explain the phenomenon to Dahomeans as it exists in other African societies, and to note their reactions. Accepting the facts as such, the usual comment was, "Yes, that is good. I can see it. But we do not do it that way."

In conclusion, it is to be added that if no native tradition exists to explain the absence of age-classes, there is ample contemporary accounting for the fact that secret societies were not a part of Dahomean culture. Here the enquirer need go no farther than a consideration of the political organisation of Dahomey. Dahomeans are fully cognizant of the existence of secret societies, especially in the neighboring territory of Nigeria; indeed, as was shown, at the present time certain Nigerian secret societies are making headway even in Abomey, where, as has been stated, there is one Oro chapter, and three groups of Egu. But in the days of the kingdom, when political power was maintained through complete subjugation of the populace, the existence of secret societies offered too tempting an invitation to subversive activities to be permitted by a dynasty of the character of the Aladaxónù kings. In the Dahomean kingdom, only one source of power might exist—the King. As a matter of fact, the King of Dahomey was even jealous of the cult of the Earth deities, since the Earth gods, under their collective appellation, Sagbatá, were called "Kings of the Earth." The Dahomean "associations," then, are to be viewed as falling into a matrix of cooperative effort such as stamps all phases of Dahomean culture, rather than as a concomitant of those religious, political, or educational drives which make for typical West African secret organisations.

Part IV

***THE LIFE-CYCLE OF THE
INDIVIDUAL***

Chapter XIV

BIRTH AND PUBERTY

In the preceding section, where the social framework within which the individual lives his life was described, it was seen how his personal contacts, his interests, the occupations he follows, and his position in society are all determined by this social structure. In dealing with a society as a whole, however, it must not be lost sight of that the social fabric is but composed of the strands woven by the lives of the individuals who comprise that society. Because of this, a study of the institutions found in a culture must be complemented by an investigation into the manner in which the individual takes his place among his fellows, and how he responds to the patterns of behavior that arise out of the traditions of his civilisation. It is a commonplace that the processes which bring about the accommodation of an individual to the traditions which govern behavior in his society begin, almost literally, at the moment of birth. It is also recognized that, in its larger sense, this education is not ended with maturity, but rather that the process comes to an end only at death. A consideration of the cultural life-cycle of the individual Dahomean will serve, therefore, to illustrate how these processes function.

As can be deduced from the manner of classifying marriage types,¹ the bearing of children bulks large in the thought of the Dahomeans. Should a wife not become pregnant in due course of time after her marriage, a diviner is consulted to see whether some malevolent force is not preventing conception, and if this is the case, steps are taken to appease this supernatural power or to appeal to others to give her a child.² Charms are sought and worn by the woman; of one such, given by the diviner when he is consulted, and called a *gbowókq*—a charm “to make a woman sleep well”—a description was obtained. In it are red beads (*γυηdyévè*), black beads such as are worn on the wrist (*atìηkùη*), raffia (*gannédjò*), nuts such as are often found

¹ Cf. Ch. XVI.

² See below, vol. ii, pp. 145–147, for a description of such a rite.

in nests of vultures, (*súdékí*), and the seeds used in playing the *adjí* game, (*adjíkwi*).

Three stages are recognized in pregnancy. the first when a woman is in a condition of *sígɓwè*—"moon-stop"—that is, when her menstrual flow is interrupted. This is followed by the period known as *émɔxò*—"she-find-belly." when doubt no longer exists of an actual pregnancy—usually after the third month, and the final stage when she "hears the child," that is to say, when she feels the child stirring. This stage is variously termed *xoxónò*, "long-time-pregnant-woman," and *ganovì*, "stomach-mother-child." When a woman has reached the second stage of pregnancy, several routine precautions are taken. She is supplied with charms to protect her against mishaps in pregnancy, and if the husband's clan customs require special rites, or involve special taboos. these will be observed from this time until the birth of the baby.

The birth of a child may take place either in the compound of its father, or at the home of its maternal grandmother.¹ No distinct rule governs the choice, so that when the labor-pains begin, the woman goes to the place that is within easier reach, although in those categories of marriage where the children belong to the father's family. it is customary to be confined in the husband's compound. A midwife who had delivered others of the family is called, and is assisted by two or three other women. The husband may or may not be present. The woman in labor is undressed and made to kneel on a bed of sacred *akíkoma* leaves, while the older women in the house—her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, or her husband's mother's sister—pray for a good delivery to Mawù, the god of the Sky, and to the deified ancestors of the family. If before birth the child had been vowed to a deity, this spirit also would have been called upon to aid. The mother may, in addition. pray to her own deity. if she is a cult-initiate. The soul of the woman is not called upon to help her, because when Mawù is appealed to, the soul that Mawu gave is included in the prayer. Other offerings are made following family usage and special ancestral edicts; but above all, a sacrifice is given to *Legbá*, the spirit who, as messenger of the gods, holds such an important place among the Dahomean pantheons. If the diviner has not designated a special shrine where this sacrifice to *Legbá* is to be made, they go to the nearest one. and give a chicken or a cock, whichever is at hand, adding to this the necessary palm-oil, salt, peppers, *akásà*, a corn meal gruel, and *colas* also, if that is the family practice.

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, pp. 227-231, for a discussion of pregnancy and birth.

The woman remains on her knees until the intensity of the labor-pains indicate that the child is about to be born, when a large roll of cloth is placed to support her as she squats with her heels touching it, while two women hold her arms out at full length, and the midwife receives the child. The infant is placed on a bed of *akúkoma* leaves which had been made ready nearby; if its initial cry is not heard at once, sand is rubbed on the arms of the child. The umbilical cord is not cut until, with the aid of the midwife's tugging, the placenta has been ejected. When this occurs, the midwife is handed a cleanly sharpened bamboo stick about ten inches long, which serves as a knife, and with it cuts the umbilicus, for no metal knife may be employed. Brandishing this bamboo knife, she says, "Mother, I am going to cut the cord of your child," and five times she goes through the motion of cutting, repeating both statement and gesture. Each time the mother answers, "No, no! Do not cut the cord!" After the fifth time, the midwife once more says, "Mother, I am going to cut the cord of your child," and now there is no answer. She thereupon counts "Six, seven, eight," making a gesture of cutting as she pronounces each number; if the child is a girl, the umbilicus is cut as the eighth gesture is made and the word "eight" is pronounced; if a boy, she cuts when she says "nine." The cord is cut a finger's length—about three or four inches—from the body of the child, and is tied with a bit of raffia or cotton thread.

As soon as the cord is cut, one of the women in attendance bathes the child in tepid water, while another bathes the mother in hot water. Not only is the body of the mother washed completely, but the midwife, with index and second fingers held together and covered with suds of native black soap, carefully cleanses the vagina. When the mother and child have been bathed, the infant is given a few drops of a brew of *akúkoma* leaves cooked in water, and the mother is allowed to eat some corn meal. According to one account the placenta and cord are taken to be buried where the mother habitually bathes, the task being done by a man and a woman with the man optionally the father of the child, and the woman,* though usually a member of the father's family, not of necessity one who is related to him. The man digs the hole and the woman places the placenta, the cord and some *akúkoma* leaves inside it, after which the hole is covered over and a stone is placed to protect it from prowling animals. No special significance is attached to this site. When the navel cord dries and drops off it is taken by members of the father's sib to the fields belonging to the family,

where it is buried under a palm-tree. Nothing is buried with it, but when the child grows up, the palm-kernels from his *γγḍḍḗ* are his. A slightly differing version of this proceeding held that only the placenta is buried behind the house at the bathing-place of the women; and that the umbilical cord is severed from the placenta and taken at once to be buried under a palm-tree, and when the remainder of the umbilicus falls off, it is interred under the same tree. Both these practices obtain and reflect a slight divergence in customary practice as is found to occur in all ritual, however institutionalized. The important matter is the burial of the umbilicus under a tree, and preferably under a wealth producing palm-tree, for this figures in the later life of the child, as will be noted in the discussion of religious beliefs.¹

Children born with anomalous physical characteristics are held to be under the guardianship of special supernatural agents. Those born with six fingers or toes are thought to belong to *Lísa*, the powerful member of the Sky pantheon. The extra finger (or toe) is cut off. These children are believed destined to be rich, for their polydactylism is held to be a sign of good luck. Children born with four fingers are deemed *txxsu*, that is, of the class of abnormally born infants belonging to the river spirits. When such a child is born, the parents send for the priest of the *txxsu*, and the fates are consulted to find out whether the child will bring riches or poverty to its parents, and what had best be done with him. Many children of this type, it is said, are ordered "sent back," in which case the child is taken to a river bank and after certain ceremonies, is left there. Some children whom Fate orders to be returned to the river refuse to accept this verdict, and cry out, or speak their protest—the *txxsu* are thought to be able to speak at birth—until they are taken home. Such a one was the child whose photograph is given here. In this instance, the *txxsu* was not a four-fingered child, but one with a large head. Four-fingered children, however, are not customarily given to the river, because they are considered only partial *txxsu*, and though the parents are not pleased with a child of this kind they do not refuse to rear him. Once arrived at maturity, such persons experience no difficulty in getting married. In the *txxsu* category also come stillborn and aborted children, as well as hermaphroditic types, malformed children, and misshapen births.²

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 250–252.

² Cf. Skortchly, p. 107: "If a child is born with teeth or speaks before the usual time, the phenomenon is considered as of ill augury to the country, and the innocent cause is condemned to be smothered in mud."

By far the most prized category of births are the twins, called *hohovi*.¹ Twins are treated more carefully than other children. They are always dressed alike, and all gifts given them must be in duplicate. If one dies, a small wooden image is made and the surviving twin continually carries this about. If a gift is given to the child, the same gift must be given to the image of its dead twin.

Before the conquest, during and after parturition, it was customary to build a fire inside the house to heat it. This is now done optionally only, because these fires, which often catch in the dry thatch of the roof, endanger the lives of the mother and child. Instead, the woman is covered with what cloths are at hand; and if her husband is a man of wealth, he sends many large cloths as gifts to his wife and child to keep them warm. A man of great substance may also send a mosquito net to protect his wife.

A great deal of attention is paid to the matter of names.² In the discussion of religion, it will be seen how important a name may be, and this is characteristic of various classes of names, for, like most Africans, the Dahomean bears many names. The names given a person at the time of his birth, however, are particularly important, and it is essential that these be kept secret, for one who might wish to work bad magic against a child when grown would be materially aided in his purpose were he to know the names that had been bestowed at birth. They include a name given by the mother, which is held most secret, the name derived from the deity of the mother, if she has one, and a third name determined by the deity of the father, if he is a cult-initiate. The name of the ancestral spirit whose soul animates the child is given later, while, when a man reaches the age of eighteen or twenty, still another name is added; and to a girl at marriage, her husband gives a new name, while if he or she is initiated as a cult-member, there is still another name.³

At this place some of the particularizing names descriptive of the circumstances of their birth may be detailed. A child born after

¹ The line in this part of West Africa which separates the regions where twins are sacred and where they are held in abhorrence runs north and south through Western Nigeria. In Dahomey there is a well-developed twin cult; the spirits of twins are believed to be among those who inhabit the "forest," and are worshipped by the Dahomeans.

² Le Herissé, pp. 235-242, devotes a section to the importance of names, in which he gives the various categories of names bestowed on an individual.

³ It can be seen that Burton greatly simplifies the matter of naming when he says (vol. ii, p. 105), "The child's name is given on the eighth day after the Buko-no has pronounced what ancestor has sent it." Though what he says is true, except for the age of the child when this rite is performed, it is far from being the whole story.

twins, if male, is called Dósu, if female, Dosì. The infant born to the same mother following this child—the second after twins—is called, if male, Dósa, if female, Dóhwè. The next child, the third after twins, is called, if male, Dónyó, if female, Dohweví. When conception occurs before the mother has resumed menstruation, the child is called, if a male, Ðosú, if female, Ðosì, while the child born to its mother succeeding this one is called, if a male, Ðosà; if a female, Ðohwè. A boy born feet foremost is called Agósú; a girl, Agósì; the child following one of these if a male, is called Agósà, if a female Agóhwè. A child born with head presentation and eyes toward the sky is called Nwẹsú, if a boy, Nwẹsì, if a girl; while the brother or sister following it in order of birth is called, according to sex, Nwẹsà or Nwẹhwè. The names for a child born at noon are Hwesù and Hwesì; the next child is called Hwesà if a boy, Hwesé if a girl.

It is believed that not all pregnancies are of nine months' duration; stories are told of women who have been pregnant one, two or three years. One woman was pointed out who, it was said, had been pregnant for thirteen years. In such a case the woman, after a cessation of the menstrual flow for three or four months, experiences it again. Feeling ill, she goes to a diviner, who after consulting Fate to discover whether the woman is actually with child, gives her medicine and then looks after her until menstruation ceases once more. If a child is later born to this woman, she is said to have had a "long" pregnancy. In the case of one such child, a boy, who is thought to have been in his mother's womb for three years, the name Kosú was given. If the child born of a prolonged pregnancy is a girl, her name is Kosì. The next child born to such a woman, if a boy, is called Kósà, if a girl, Kóhwè.

A boy born with his umbilical cord about his neck is called Gbokó, or Gbokósì if a girl; the succeeding child is called either Gbokósà or Gbókóhwè. A child born with a caul—"with a veil over its face"—who follows the first child after twins, is called, if a boy Wusú, if a girl Wúmè. The child born after such a one is called Wúsà or Wuhwè, according to sex. If the child with the caul does not follow the first child born after twins, then the names given are Kesú or Kesì; the child who follows one of these is called Kesà, if a boy. No special name is given a girl born immediately after a child with a caul. When the mother discharges much water while giving birth, the male child is called Tosú, the female Tosì. If a child is born on the road, it is called, according to sex, Alihonú or Alihosi; if born in the market-place

—something, it is said, that occurs often—the name given is *Axisú* and *Axisì*. For these latter two categories of names there are no particular terms used for children born immediately following them.

As has been stated, children are also given names which follow the religious affiliations of their parents. If the mother of a child is a member of a cult-group, then the child is given a special name; if the father is a member of one of these groups, but not the mother, the name is given according to the father's affiliation; while if both father and mother belong to cult-groups, then the child is named after the deity of its mother. If neither father nor mother belong to a cult-group, then a child is named after the *Fá*—the Destiny—of the father. If neither parent belongs to a cult-group and the father has not "established" his *Fá*, then the child is called by an ordinary name. Examples of these may be given; for boys, there are names such as *Nyàkadjà*, "man with a rough skin"; *Nyàsánù*, "man of men"; *Kpadúnu*, "a thing to make the hedge"; *Nyáwì*, "black man"; for girls, *Nyọnu pódwè*, "short woman"; *Nyọnú ví*, "little woman"; *Nyọnú wí*, "black woman"; *Nyọnú vò*, "red woman," are among the names given. If the child is born of a father who has "established" his Destiny and the parents do not belong to cult-groups, then the names given are as follows: the first child, if male, *Amòsù*, if female, *Alògbá*; the second child, if male, *Kápò*, if female *Alògbahwè*; the third child if male, *Mòchò*, if female, *Kìndà*; the fourth child, if male, *Mòsà*, if female, *Àdjé*.¹ If the mother is a follower of the Sky cult or of the Earth deities, then the first child is called *Asógbàkitikli* if a male; *Agbálè* if a female. The next child is called *Àzòvídí*, or *Chádàsì*, according to sex. The third child does not take its name from the pantheon which the mother worships but takes the father's *Fá* name; if the father has not "established" his Destiny, the third child takes an ordinary name. If the mother is a worshipper of the Thunder gods, then the first child is called *Sosú* or *Sosì*, according to sex; the second *Sósà* or *Sosíxwè*; the third *Soyé* or *Sósivù*. If the mother worships the deities of the Sea (also members of this pantheon), the first child is called *Tòsú*, or *Tòsì*, the second *Tósà* or *Tòsìhwe*, the third *Tògbadjí* or *Tòhweví*. However, in this case, if one does not desire to use these names, then for boys one can give the names *Hunú* (thing of the sea), *Hunyú*, or *Hùgbadjí*; for girls, *Hunó*, *Húsì* or *Husìhwè*. If the mother is a member

¹ Cf. Burton, vol. ii, p. 8, note 1: "If a man 'get Afa' before the births of his children, the first boy is called Amoso, and the girl Alugba; the next are named Mocho and Alugba-hwe, and so on."

of the ancestral cult, her first child, if a boy, is called Xòsú, if a girl Xòsì; the second, if a boy, Xòsà, if a girl. Xòsihwè, the third, Xòdè, or Xòkámè. If the mother is a follower of that group of deities in the ancestral cult known as *taxusu*, the abnormally born, then her first child, if a boy, will be called Bosu, if a girl, Bosi; following this, the next child will be named either Bósà or Bóhwè, the third Bóniyé or Bóné. One other name may be noted, which is given to a child known as *abikũ*. The *abikũ* are children born to a woman, all of whom die shortly after birth. The actuating cause of these deaths, a spirit who will be considered when religious concepts are discussed, is also known as *abikũ*, and there are many devices which are employed to guard a child, believed to be an *abikũ*, from death. These measures will also be described later; in this connection it is sufficient to state that the name given to an *abikũ*, whether boy or girl, is Wolú.¹

On the fifth day after birth a ceremony called *vidézhwè* ("child-go-out-house") is performed.² The baby is put on a mat on the threshold of the room where it was born, and there its head is shaved. Strands of raffia are placed about its neck, wrists, waist, and ankles. A knot is made some inches from the end of each raffia band, and a black grain called *atikuŋ* is strung on these ends and tied in place. These bands are worn until the child breaks them; being fragile, they do not remain in place very long. They are not replaced, but they must fall off of themselves. A hole is dug before the door; a chicken and a cock are killed and the blood is allowed to flow into the hole, while some of the blood is put on the child's head. The chickens are cooked and eaten at the threshold, and the bones are thrown into the hole, which is then filled in. A dish of corn flour and chicken called *amiyó* is prepared of which the mother must eat, and others may partake. At this "little ceremonial," a dance is given with drums; the relatives of the child come bringing gifts, and they are provided with food and drink. The *avogǎ*, a social dance that is danced in the market-place, is the order of the day, and with singing and drumming and the accompaniment of rhythms beaten on chests and thighs, the first appearance of the child at the threshold of its birth-place is celebrated. However, the infant is carried no farther than the threshold, for it is usually not before a month has elapsed after its birth and sometimes three months or more that it is taken out of doors. When this occurs someone

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 260-261.

² According to another account, this takes place on the eighth day after birth, depending, then, it would seem, on whether the four or seven day week was observed.

precedes the mother, throwing water on the ground, but there is no further ceremony.

A woman who is a favorite of her husband is permitted, if his means allow, to do no work outside his compound for a year after the birth of her child, or even longer, if she gives birth to twins. Others, not so well off, allow their wives to abstain from work in the field or market for six or seven months, but almost any husband, if he does not altogether scorn the will of the ancestors, will allow the woman to remain at home for three months after she has borne him a child, no matter what his circumstances, and during this interval, the husband sees to it that she is provided with food, and water, and firewood. In addition to caring for her infant, the woman does her own cooking and washing, but if she is a market-woman, some friend or relative takes care of her place in the market, or if she has her own field, someone will be found to harvest it for her. The substitute in the market-place is allowed to keep whatever profit she makes during this period, while whoever works the woman's field shares the produce with her, unless the husband pays another woman to do the work, or, having independent means, the mother herself hires a woman to do this work. In both of these latter instances the produce is hers.

From the day of the child's birth until such interruptions as occur when the mother resumes the routine of cohabitation with its father, the child sleeps beside its mother on a mat on the floor of her house wrapped in cloths. While the mother busies herself about the compound, the child lies on a cloth in a shady corner of the compound, under the eaves, but always within sight of its mother. If the child becomes restless, she will put it astride her back, inside a cloth which she ties in front. The mother then proceeds to go about her tasks, regardless of whether the child is awake or asleep, pounding meal in a mortar, or washing, or cooking, while the head of the child rolls this way and that as the mother moves. The infant wears no clothes, but may have a string with a few beads about its middle as it grows older.

When a child is three months old, an older child, one who may be as young as four or as old as twelve years, but one who walked when very young, is called to help perform the following ceremony. A dish which is red in color, made of corn meal, millet and palm-oil, called *amidjá*, is prepared. With white ashes, *afí*, and soot, *avi*, this dish is used to form three concentric circles, the black being the outer one and the red the inner. The child who had been summoned now takes up the baby and raises and lowers it within the innermost circle six times,

letting it remain there the seventh time. This ceremony is called *vi sɔ djɔ́dʒɔ̀yì* ("child-take-seat"). When the child is about five months old, the diviner is called to tell who is its *djɔ́tɔ́*, or guardian ancestral spirit—that is, to indicate the ancestor of whose soul the child partakes.¹ This rite is called *vi dɛ nyí* ("child-ask-name"), or *vi sɔ́yì fɛlɛmɛ́*, ("child-take-go-forge"). The latter term has reference to the saying, "A man is like iron. If a man owns a bar of iron and does not take it to the forge to be made into some object, he will not know what to call it. So it is with a child." The diviner then discovers from Fate the actuating principle of the child's soul, and the ancestor from whom this soul has been derived is now known.

As previously noted, a child is nursed for from two to three years. After the birth of her child, while nursing it, the mother wears a *kòdò*, a kerchief attached to the belt in front and back which completely covers the vagina. If the child is a boy, this cloth is worn for the first five months after birth; if a girl, it is worn for about three months. The parents do not cohabit for at least six months, and in many cases for a year after the birth of their child, but in a polygynous establishment the husband will have no sex-contact with his wife for the duration of the nursing period. It is held that the ancestors had long ago revealed that if there is cohabitation too soon after birth, the child born from the resulting pregnancy will be sickly and destined to die. If the parents hold strictly to the rules of the ancestors, then a husband who has only one wife must go to other women to gratify his sexual desire in order to observe the full period of two years of abstinence.² The hygienic principles involved in such a rule are obvious, and, in the light of theories concerning the "primitive mind," it is worthy of remark that this principle is based on careful observation of fact, since it is well understood by the Dahomeans that too frequent child-bearing not only destroys the health of the mother but causes her to bear sickly children.

Though children are greatly desired, there are circumstances when an undesirable pregnancy causes a woman to resort to abortion (*xòdide*).³ To bring about an abortion after the first or second month of pregnancy, the juice of limes (*kelekele*) and a piece of *akámú*, a

¹ See below, Ch. XXXI, for the discussion of the souls of man.

² In pre-conquest times, as has been noted, three years, not two, was the recognized period of abstinence. The men having but one wife constituted, and still constitute, an appreciable proportion of the visitors to those "public women" referred to by Burton, vol. ii, pp. 148-149.

³ No information to indicate that the Dahomeans have knowledge of contraceptive measures was had, despite repeated investigation of this point.

substance which has the appearance of a yellowish stone, are brought to the boiling point, when the *akāmā* stone dissolves and makes of the boiling juice a foamy drink. The usual quantity of a single draught is made of the equivalent of a cup of lime juice, and a piece of the *akāmā* as large as a lime. This drink may be repeated two or three times in as many days, or even taken at shorter intervals if the woman is very distraught. If it is had recourse to in the first or second month of pregnancy, it is said to bring a return of the menstrual flow. If taken three months after conception, however, it is believed too late. In such a case a woman tries it twice or three times, and when there is no effect, does nothing more.¹ The drink is taken with the knowledge of the husband by a woman who wishes to have connection with her husband while continuing to nurse her child. Apparently, it is at present more often employed for this purpose than in earlier times, as today a man is not as willing to wait the full period that custom decrees before resuming relations with a wife who has borne him a child.²

During the first months of nursing little food other than the mother's milk is given the baby. At four months a broth of corn or of *akūkoma* leaves is fed the child, who, when a year old, may eat a little cooked corn meal and a vegetable stew made of okra and other greens. There is, of course, no regular feeding time, but usually, during infancy the mother offers the child the breast every few hours. As soon as the child is given broth, it is fed forcibly for several months, or, in fact, until it learns to eat whenever food is presented to it. The forcible feeding is done in the following fashion. As the child lies or sits in its mother's lap, she supports the child's chin on the palm of her left hand, while she presses the nostrils together with the index and second fingers of the same hand, thus forcing the child to open its mouth to

¹ This abortive is taken secretly by unmarried girls who have become pregnant, or by women who have conceived while their husbands were away from home, though as to the latter group, it is not believed that taking such measures suffices to keep women who deceive their husbands free from punishment, for, to quote the statement of one woman, "When you go to another man, someone always tells your husband. In any case, a woman's face changes after a month's pregnancy and the old women know you are pregnant. If later nothing happens, they know you drank lime-juice. People always find out."

² Cf. Dalzel, p. xix (Introduction): "The Dahoman women do not admit the embraces of their husbands during pregnancy, nor at the time of suckling, which continues two or three years, nor while under the catamenia; during which they retire to a part of the town allotted for their reception." Le Herissé derives the very basis of Dahomean polygyny from this fact (pp. 224-225), as does another much earlier writer (Smith), who says (p. 202): "... for they never cohabit with any of their Wives when pregnant or menstruous, which indeed are potent Reasons for Polygamy."

breathe. As soon as it does this she forces the food into the open mouth with her right hand. There are, therefore, no feeding problems, for the Dahomean women who must leave at dawn or before dawn for their markets or for the fields, cannot take the time to cultivate fastidious habits in their children. When the child is to be weaned, the mother sprays her breasts with the sour juice of a leaf called *amavive*. Normally the period of weaning occupies some three months' time, though if the child is ill during this period, it is prolonged. Children are watched closely when the time comes for them to begin to talk, for those who do not learn are deemed to be idiots. Such children are left to themselves; if they survive, there is no special stigma attached to them, nor any feeling that they are marked as belonging to the supernatural world.

At this point, it may be well to indicate the special observances that mark the childhood of twins. The ceremony that occurs when an ordinary child is taken for the first time to the threshold of the room where it was born, is also carried out for twins.¹ However, there is no feast, and the ceremonial is conducted without the accompanying dance, for twins are held to be delicate, and the parents do not entertain too much hope that either or both of a pair of twins will survive. Twins are not taken from the house for some five months to a year after their birth, for a great feast that entails long and expensive preparation must be given on this occasion. When they are a year old a low mound is made for them. This is divided into two parts and identical offerings are made on each part.

When two years old, that is, when they are able to walk some distance, the mother of twins takes them for a ritual visit to the market *aizq̃*. She wears a folded cloth on her head and she is followed by the twins. As this little procession goes on its way to the market, they are given gifts by all who meet them. They first pause before the *aizq̃* of the market, where they make an offering of a bit of every article sold in the market. They make the tour of the market itself, and receive gifts. Each year thereafter, their mother sends a woman, perhaps her sister, with a large calabash on her head in which rest two small gourds. The smallest quantity purchasable of everything that is sold in the market is obtained, and this is brought home and put on the double mound. The ceremony before the *aizq̃* is to insure that the mother will bear other children. If the woman is pregnant before the children are taken to the market, the ceremonial occurs

¹ See above, pp. 266-267.

at night, for she has violated the will of the ancestors. Should the twins die before the market ceremony can take place, then another rite, called "sending the *hohovi* to their forest" is held. This is because of the belief that twins, when they die, go to their home in the forest, and it is necessary to know to which forest they have repaired. As usual, the diviner is called upon to give the necessary instructions, and when the rite has been performed, this is held to permit the parents to have other children, and, further, to assure that no similar ills befall their later offspring.

If one twin dies and the other lives, then both the ceremonials of taking the children to the market and of notifying the forest must be performed. The market ceremony is held first. A child of the same sex, age, and of about the same size as the deceased takes the place of the deceased twin. The two children are dressed alike and are taken to the market where the ritual takes place as though these were both the actual twins. The one who is chosen to substitute for the dead twin acts only in these ceremonies and has no special prerogatives, nor does he stand in any special relationship to the surviving twin after the market rite has been completed. In the ceremony of "notifying the forest," when the diviner designates the clump of bush where the deceased twin is supposed to have taken up his residence, the family take a medium-sized calabash, and fill it with bits of many kinds of food. The officiant at this rite must be a woman who has borne twins of comparable sex as those for whom the ceremony is being performed; if the twins are of the same sex, then this woman's children must have been of that sex, while if the twins are one male and one female, the woman who officiates must have borne twins of both sexes. Four chickens are taken there, together with a double pot of the type sacred to the twin cult, and a twin *asê*—one of those iron standards used as an altar for the spirits of the dead to which reference has already been made. Two chickens are killed in the ceremonial manner—by pulling out the tongue—and the blood is poured over the pots and the standard. The two live chickens are held in the hand and the feathers spread so as to constitute a fan with which the dead chickens are fanned. These two live chickens, the pot and the *asê* are taken back to the house of the parents of the twins, and the bodies of the sacrificed chickens are left in the forest. The twin-pots and the *asê* are then placed on the divided mound sacred to the twins, and four chickens are killed, and their blood is allowed to flow into the twin pots. The chickens are then cooked and eaten by all who have gathered for the ceremony.

At the death of one of a pair of twins, a wooden image called a *hoho*—a twin—is bought for the remaining one, as was observed. For a young child the burial is simple, but if the child was old enough to have eaten solids—that is, if it had been weaned—then cloths are given in which to dress it, for otherwise the burial is effected without clothing the corpse. A diviner is consulted whether it is necessary to make special sacrifices for the surviving member of the pair. The grave of twins is always dug in the house of their mother, and whether one or both of the twins die, the ceremony is the same.

Those who come under the category of twins—that is, those who are worshipped in the rites of the twin-cult—comprise a larger group of births than twins themselves. Many of the types which show some favored anomaly at birth are regarded as being in the group. That is, a child born with an umbilical cord about its neck, or with a caul, or born feet foremost, are held to belong in the same class with twins. Thus an *agpsũ*—a child born feet foremost—is regarded as a *hoho dũxò*, an “elder,” or higher ranking, twin. All of the special twin ceremonies must be carried out for such a child, the only difference being that, in his case, nothing is paired. But his mother must take him to the market, and when he dies, his spirit is thought to go to the forest. Similar ceremonies are given, and the same beliefs are held, for all other births that fall in this “twin” category. All these children are respected, but some are feared, or disliked. The *dósu*, the child after twins, is held in aversion, for example, because it is believed that these children are avaricious and grasping, that they never share their possessions with another; that they are not to be relied upon by friends or relatives to be of assistance in times of adversity. So lively is this feeling that some care was taken by the Dahomeans who discussed this trait to point out various *dósu* among mutual acquaintances, and to detail instances to prove the truth of this belief. This trait is not held to be shared by twins themselves, or by *agpsũ* children.

Returning now to a consideration of the development of the normal child, it is to be observed that very young children are carried most of the time on the backs of their mothers or, in rare instances, of nurses. Unless prevented by special circumstances, a mother takes her baby with her wherever she goes, and women may be seen selling in the market, carrying burdens on the road, working in the fields, or dancing in ceremonial dances with their infants straddling their backs. A child is trained by the mother who, as she carries it about, senses when it is restless, so that every time it must perform its



a) A Dahomean twin. Note the doll carried by this child, the image of its deceased twin.



b) Forceible feeding of a baby is resorted to if necessary.



A Fá cup with the design of a mother feeding her infant.

excretory functions, the mother puts it on the ground. Thus in time, usually two years, the training process is completed. If a child does not respond to this training, and manifests enuresis at the age of four or five, soiling the mat on which it sleeps, then, at first, it is beaten. If this does not correct the habit, ashes are put in water and the mixture is poured over the head of the offending boy or girl, who is driven into the street, where all the other children clap their hands and run after the child singing,

Adida go ya ya ya
"Urine everywhere."

In Whydah, the child is taken to the lagoon and washed, this being repeated a second time if necessary. If the habit is then not stopped, a live frog is attached to the child's waist, which so frightens the offender that a cure is usually effected. In Abomey, however, beating is the customary punishment.

A child is taught to walk when it is about a year old. A young relative is the teacher, and holds the baby by its hand and encourages its first steps. When the child learns to take a few short steps, four small bells strung on a cord are placed about each foot, so that the child, hearing the tinkling sound made at every step is encouraged to continue its efforts. These bells, called *yoyuŋi*, are made in one special quarter of Abomey by a group of the metal-working guild who produce no other wares. The delighted shrieks of a small child taking its first steps, to the accompaniment of the jingle of bells, testify to the efficacy of this device. When the child has learned to walk well, if it belongs to one of the special twin categories, it is taken by its mother for a ritual visit to the market, described in the preceding pages. If a child does not belong to one of these categories, however, then his learning to walk satisfactorily is marked by no departure from the routine of daily life. A part of this routine consists in the beginning of his training in the occupations of his elders. For example, in the family that inhabited the courtyard of a house in Abomey where observations were made was a child of two years and some months. At that age, he had begun to carry a stool to the market some several hundred yards distant for his mother, and could be seen from time to time carrying an empty calabash or a dish on his head. Again, during a visit to the quarter of the iron-workers on a day when work at the forge was forbidden because it was sacred to the god of iron, some of the children could be seen playing at the trade of their fathers.

The bellows of one forge had been brought out, and two boys, who were judged to be eight or nine years old, were handling the red-hot iron with the tongs their elders used, and hammering this metal into shape on the anvil. The usual task of such a boy is to work the bellows for his father or uncle or older brother; in this case, the bellows were being operated by a still younger boy, who could not have been more than three or four years old. Thus the pattern was reproduced; the point here, however, is to indicate at what an early age a child begins to participate in Dahomean life.

A little girl, when she is but five years old, accompanies her mother to the market, does small tasks about the house, or pulls up weeds in the field, so that by the time she is ten or eleven years old, she is able to cook all of the staple foods used in a household, to wash the cloths used by the women, and to do all the minor tasks of her sex. The same thing is true of boys, who watch their elders at work and play at their fathers' occupations, thus absorbing techniques, or help the older men in the fields. Both boys and girls of nine or ten years of age or younger have been seen helping with the planting; indeed, by the time a boy has attained the age of eleven or twelve he is supposed to know the essentials of agriculture.

None of this, however, is attended with any ceremonial. The most important ceremony during this whole period, as far as the children themselves are concerned, has to do with the change in dentition. The deciduous teeth are never pulled, but each tooth as it begins to loosen is worked back and forth by the child with his tongue or fingers until he can remove it, or until it drops out. It is considered a bad omen for the parents if the upper teeth come before the lower, and medicine is put on the upper gum to prevent such an occurrence, for if a boy's upper teeth appear first, his father will die; if it is a girl to whom this occurs, the mother will die, or, to phrase it in the Dahomean idiom, the parent "will be replaced" by this child. The medicine to prevent this is made as follows:

A bearded goat, some sand, and a leaf called *mélémamwe*, are found. A piece of skin is then taken from the goat, and the earth is worked so as to make a piece about the length and thickness of a finger. The skin which had been rolled lightly is put through this bit of earth and the whole is pasted over the gums.

Certain herbs are also felt efficacious for this purpose, and if rubbed against the gums, are said to stop the teeth from coming.

We may suppose the child has reached the age when its deciduous teeth are giving way to the permanent ones, and the first tooth worked loose is a lower one. This is shown to the mother, who thereupon spits into the child's mouth to insure that "He will have others." The child then assembles his playmates, and, tooth in hand, throws it on the roof of his mother's house. His playmates organize a dance—a "little play"—with songs and hand-clapping and as they move in a circle they sing, among other songs:

"He who has lost a tooth,
Cannot eat salt:
Come, give me palm-oil
To eat with my cake."

"I do not want the teeth of a pig,
They are big!
I want the teeth of a goat,
They are small!"

The appearance of teeth before the child is able to sit up is also an unwelcome occurrence, the feeling being that such children will always be sickly. Such of these children as survive, tradition tells, will be well-to-do, for they come from the serpent spirit who is the giver of riches. In spite of this, and though credited with being highly intelligent and able they are disliked, for they are said to be thoroughly "bad," and are reared by their parents without affection. When they attain maturity and gain wealth and position they are liked none the more, since belief holds that the greater their riches, the greater the misery and poverty of the parents.

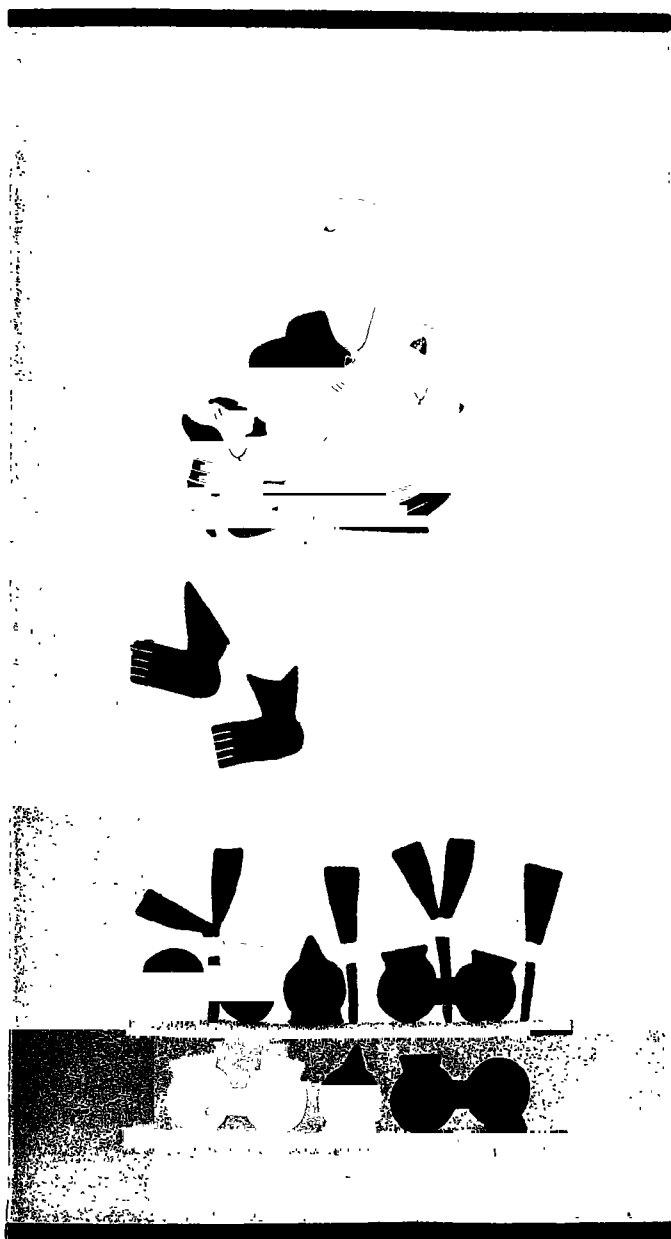
Until the age of seven, while relatively free from the routine duties he assumes, a child plays during the day, and meets with his playmates in the evenings to tell stories. These story-telling evenings are important, both for the significance of the tales as an educational device, and because of the fact that story-telling groups develop later into the playmate associations that, as will be seen, assume an important position at the time of puberty. The children gather at night—as among all African peoples, it is not believed good to tell stories in the daytime—and the meeting place is usually the home of one of the old people of the compound. As the child who acts as leader of the group takes charge, the evening's telling of tales develops into a contest in which a child must demonstrate his story-telling ability by the number of tales he recounts. Penalties are assessed on those who cannot answer the opening riddles, and these penalties take the form

of assigning the delinquent a certain number of tales which he must tell the group. At these sessions, the children tell animal tales, or those about Yo, the gross supernatural trickster who is hero of so many Dahomean stories, and, since most of these tales carry morals, they are held by their elders to be learning the precepts of the good way of life. Until the boys and girls reach the age of puberty, they play together freely, though even at this early age parents discourage them from going off together where they cannot be watched. This type of group play and of education through the telling of tales, then, continues until they are about eleven, twelve or thirteen years old. In some compounds, however, the boys and girls play separately, and have their own story-telling groups from about the ages of seven to ten or eleven. It is probable that these differences, once more, represent a natural enough variation in customary usage between compounds, to be expected in a culture as complex as that of Dahomey.

It may be inquired at this point how, in a non-literate culture, the age of children is known. As will be seen below when the annual census is described, it was of importance that the age of all children under thirteen be known. A simple device was employed. Every year, the Dahomean King entered a campaign, or to quote the native phrase, he "made a conquest." These campaigns were given special names, and if a person wished to know the age of a child, he merely enumerated the campaigns of the past years until that of the year when the child was born was reached. The count told the age of the individual. Even old men, by the use of this mnemonic device, know their ages fairly accurately, and today such men count backwards the "conquests" from the year of the overthrow of the Dahomean kingdom by the French to that of the year of their birth, and add to this the number of years that have elapsed since the conquest, to figure their ages.

When a boy has reached the age of eight, he becomes an *aso nyayɛ tɔ* ("partridge-chaser-person"). He goes to the fields with his father and sees to it that the birds do not harm the seeds or the growing crops. A girl becomes a *nù djala tɔ* ("things-peddle-person"). Her father or mother may buy her a supply of soap, or chewing sticks, or some lumps of sugar, or small portions of salt. These she puts into a calabash and goes about selling in the village or, on market days, through the market; or she may sell sweets or cakes that her mother or her preceptress has baked for her. Her earnings, whatever they are, are her own.

Boys ten or eleven years of age are called *kpo ɛdo alɛtɔ̀* ("wood-throw-lizard"). The designation given derives from the recognition



Appliqué cloth showing mother and twins, with the ceremonial
objects of the twin cult.

that they have reached a middle period of childhood, when their motor control is equal to killing a lizard. Very young children are, of course, afraid of lizards, and while those somewhat older may have lost their fear, they are not agile enough or lack the skill to kill them. In some compounds there are low mounds for Adjagbé, a god of the hunt, and they are taught to pour a little of the blood of their kill for the god that he make them brave hunters. At this stage, too, the children not infrequently add to their kill by finding a stray pullet or chick, and appropriating it for a clandestine feed along an unfrequented path where they broil it over the fire they build. If discovered, they are severely beaten, for punishment is strict and harsh. At about this same age, when their breasts begin to appear, the girls are called *adjòle vù* ("woman-small").

At this period of life, too, the sex education of young people commences. Two versions will be given of the manner in which they are instructed, the first as described by men, and the second by women.¹

According to the version of the men, the boys at the age of nine or ten no longer sleep in the houses of their mothers. In a given compound or collectivity, all the boys of this age form a group, and build a house. It is not very large, and it is badly constructed, but it is their own, and they sleep there and do not seem abashed when their older brothers tease them about how poorly their house is built. Following the pattern of Dahomean life that dictates direction in all joint enterprises, they choose one of their number to act as head of this house. The house itself is called *góxɔ̃* and the title given the leader of the group is *axɔ̃datɔ̃ gɔ̃* ("play-person-chief"). Girls of this age sleep in the houses of their mothers or, more often, in those of their paternal grandmothers. Whether such a girl sleeps at her mother's house or not, she and her playmates gather in front of the house of a grandmother or at the house of one of the oldest women of the compound, to tell stories. From time to time groups of girls and boys from other compounds come to play with the girls or boys of this one, and the visits are returned. As the children approach puberty, the boys, when they gather in their house of an evening, tell only amorous tales.

The girls at this time have not yet arrived at the age of initial menstruation, but a group of from five to perhaps a dozen of an age ranging from nine to twelve, and coming from several compounds, begin their sex education together under the tutelage of a married

¹ This information as to the sex experiences of the women was obtained by F. S. Herskovits.

woman of between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age. This woman resides in one of the compounds from which the group of girls is drawn, but she has no special training or title, though the choice is invariably a woman who has herself borne children. At this time the process of enlarging and developing the lips of the vagina is begun. This may be done by massage, by the employment of mechanical devices, by applying chemical irritants derived from plants, by using ants,¹ or by combining the use of several of these. Thus, it was stated that the Maxi people use a horn for this purpose, though in Abomey both a special wooden instrument and the root of the indigo plant are employed, and, in addition, ants of the type called *záxwǎ* ("night-warrior"). Male informants were vague as to the exact technique employed, which is perhaps not surprising. However, as will be seen in the account given by women, the purpose of the introduction of this vegetable irritant or the stinging ants is to stimulate the process of massage, by inducing irritation which encourages tugging and handling. The teacher, besides supervising this process (stated by the men to be a "procedure which is very painful and is done little by little over a period of time"), also gives the girls instruction bearing on sexual life, though this comes only after they have attained nubility.

The boys when they meet in their house to tell love stories, dramatize their tales. Each boy chooses a partner, and, as the characters in the stories go through their erotic experiences, their embraces are imitated by the teller and his companion for the edification of the other boys of the group who constitute the audience. As may be assumed, lasting friendships are often formed on the basis of these close associations, and it is here that the initial impulses are given toward the formation of Dahomean mutual-aid societies such as have been described,² as well as toward homosexual behavior. However, these boys, now fully conscious of their inner sex drive, no longer are satisfied with merely simulating the experiences of sex. No sooner, therefore, does a "class" of girls begin its meetings with an instructress than the boys see to it that they discover where these are held, and they wait outside the compound wall to waylay them.³ It is not long before the two groups are meeting clandestinely to play games, but such games, it must be made clear, do not at this time involve overt sex contact. Boys and girls of this age do not play together during the daytime, but

¹ *Yǎ* is the term for the female sex organ; the lips of the vagina are called *ǎ* and the term for enlarging the lips is *oǎ*, "to pull the lips."

² See above, pp. 250ff.

only after such meetings as have been described, and the playing of typical Dahomean games for boys and girls goes on sometimes for months before there is sexual intercourse.

It is at this point that the sexual education of the boys, properly speaking, may be said to commence. One day, as this childish play of the children continues, an older brother or paternal male cousin who lives in the same compound as the boy who heads the group of adolescent boys, calls him and tells him in great secrecy that he is about to give him a wife. The boy is surprised and taken aback, but very pleased. When he has expressed his gratitude, the older one asks him, "What will you do with this wife?"

Allowing for individual variations, a colloquy ensues, of which the opening and close is somewhat as follows:

"When I have a wife she will cook for me," or "When you give me a wife I will buy her a fine cloth, and we will go to dances together."

The older youth then says, "What will you see the dance with?"

"With my eyes."

The mentor then tries to have him articulate what sensations the dance would arouse in him, and finally asks "What do you urinate with?"

"With my penis."

"Do you know how to lie with a woman?"

Very bashfully the boy replies, "No."

"Haven't you ever watched the chickens, or the pigs? Watch and see what the goats and the dogs do! Then when you have a wife you will know how to act!"

The extent to which boys, in their early adolescence, are without a knowledge of the manner in which sex contact is effectuated is striking, for though at this age the boy may have experienced orgasms when dramatizing the sex embrace in a tale being recounted, and though he has seen erotic ritual dances since childhood, he has but little idea that the sex act involves more than the embraces that he has witnessed in such dances, or that he has indulged in during the telling of a tale. This does not mean that this is true of all boys, or every group of boys of this age. Some youths are more precocious than others and from furtive observation and eavesdropping learn a good deal; it happens, too, that a young boy may spy on a couple having connection, in which case the process of enlightenment as to the mechanics of the sex act is greatly accelerated, for such boys soon spread the word among their fellows in the compound and they all come into possession of definite

information much sooner than is usual. Yet, in spite of such cases, the fact remains that most youths are without sex knowledge of a definite order until they are well into adolescence, which fact is of especial interest in the face of common assertions regarding the sexual precocity that is thought to characterize Africans.

Incidents to support these statements of the lack of experience among young Dahomean boys were witnessed. Thus, when recounting some of the facts that are given here, one informant called in two of his nephews who were in their middle adolescence, and began to question them concerning these matters. The painful shyness of these boys, and the awkwardness with which they phrased their replies to the questions they were compelled to answer because of their relationship to their questioner and his position in their family, were highly revealing. It must, of course, be borne in mind that for sexual intercourse the woman goes to the man's house, or room in the house which is occupied by the man himself, and consequently there is no opportunity for a precocious child to feign sleep and watch the sexual act between his parents. In coastal towns, where a family can afford but a one room shelter, this, of course, does not obtain. Most informants accepted as a matter of course the inexperience of young boys and girls in matters of sexual contact. One commentator explained that while, in ordinary circumstances, a boy sees everything that goes on at such erotic performances as the dancing of *Lagbá*,¹ the general acceptance of such dances as something that occurs in the ordinary course of events makes for a matter-of-fact attitude toward them; that while a boy realizes that erotic experiences between men and women exist, he has no knowledge of the details of these experiences.

It is to be expected that the young boy who has had the conversation cited with his elder brother goes at once to the boys' house to relay to his group what he has been told, for during this period discussions of sex occupy a great deal of the boys' time. When he repeats to them what the older youth has told him, there is an excited and prolonged discussion. Each adds what he has heard, or has observed, and the next day all the young boys of the compound spend their time watching the animals, as had been suggested to them. In the evening, when they gather again at their house, each gives the result of his day's investigation. Later that same evening when, as usual, they meet the girls, there is for the first time a definite intention toward sex contact in their play.

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 125-126, for the details of this dancing.

One of the most popular games played by boys and girls serves often as the instrument of these first adventures in seduction. This game, called *gb'igbe*, a kind of "hide-and-seek" which is played by couples, is peculiarly fitted for the purpose. A boy and a girl are directed, usually by the head of the boys' house at the beginning of the play, to put their hands over the eyes of the other. The rest, disappearing in couples, find hiding places. When the signal for the search is given, the couple who are "it" go about looking for those in hiding, and the pair that is first discovered must conduct the next search. On this evening, however, the interest of the boys is not in the game itself, so that, when the couples are hidden in various convenient places in or about the compound, each boy, once he is alone with the girl with whom he has been teamed, begins sex play. This is also true of the searching pair.

It must be again observed that this account is the one given by the men, and differs especially from the account of sex education given by women in the part that follows. According to the version of the men, the boys, who have been watching the animals copulate as bidden to do, are still ignorant of the normal human position in sex intercourse, and hence attempt copulation from the rear. The clumsiness of these first attempts at intercourse was emphasized in all accounts. This process of learning, however, seems to be recognized by the Dahomeans as a necessary part of the education of young people in order to avoid impotence and frigidity, and while it is important that a girl remain a virgin until she goes to her husband, it is also felt that here the inexperience of the young people not only prevents any danger of conception, but even of rupturing the hymen.

This new phase in the relationship between the boys and girls is continued nightly, the boys obtaining their knowledge of the proper position for sex contact, and some information concerning what is regarded as proper amorous behavior, from the girls. It was explained by the men that when the girls meet with their instructress, they not only are taught to manipulate the sex-organ in order to enlarge and thicken the lips of the vagina, but are taught the *agá gbè* ("love-" or "adultery-language") and, later, the eleven positions of intercourse, the woman in charge designating one of the girls to act as a man and another as a woman, and teaching them to demonstrate the details of sex intercourse. The men also insisted that the teacher informs her charges of the character of the male sex organ and—a point on which both men and women agreed—she warns them against inter-

course with a man before marriage once menstruation begins, telling them of the penalties that follow neglect of this precept. Thus it seems that when the boys begin their sex play, both boys and girls are without any exact knowledge of how to achieve intercourse. But the girls, who have a teacher to instruct them in these matters, teach those with whom they are paired the proper method of performing the act. "Among us Dahomeans it is always the woman who teaches the man," remarked one man. That such a system of sex education is recognized as a part of the teaching to be given children, is indicated further by the fact that a definite term, *nuzize*, is applied to it.

Before proceeding with a consideration of the further development of young men and women during late adolescence and until marriage, the matter of the education of early adolescents in sex may again be described, this time, however, following the accounts of woman informants. The women's version agrees with that of the men in stating that young girls are brought together in a school. According to them, girls who are from nine to eleven years old—that is, whose breasts are beginning to develop—are assembled by compounds in groups of eight or ten or more, depending upon the available number at a given time, and these engage in the practice known as *axoti*, which consists of massaging and enlarging the lips of the vagina. They gather in the evenings at sundown behind the house of the woman in whose care they have been placed, whose title is *tôkono*, ("lips-vagina-mother"), and whose most desired qualification is an age not too far removed from that of the girls so that she will not have forgotten her own experiences when undergoing this regimen, though she must be old enough to have borne at least one child. In addition, she is one who, according to the standards of the parents of the girls, is herself well adjusted not only in her own marriage, but also in her relationship with those who live in the same compound as herself.

With a shaped piece of wood, this woman manipulates the lips of the vagina of each girl, pulling at them, stretching them, and lightly puncturing the vaginal tissues in several places. This she does eight or nine times for each of her charges during the first year of instruction, and during the next year the girls do this for each other. Freshly charred soot is injected into the vagina after each manipulation, and this is rubbed into the irritated tissues to avoid infection. For two years at the very least this is continued, and in addition there is the outer massaging of these "lips" to cause thickening and muscular development, for "thin-lipped" women are considered lacking in comeliness.

The response of the women toward investigation into the reasons for this process was marked with strong emotion that took the form of violent laughter, and brought at first the explanation that the massaging was done in order that no vaginal fluids might drop upon the ground, or on the mats upon which women sit, for women wear no protecting cloth over the vagina, and this extending of the lips and their thickening was said to prevent such occurrences. It developed, however, that this practice has as its end the enhancement of pleasure in sex play, for a man is not pleased with a woman who has not undergone this process, since a part of the erotic performance consists in the man's playing with the thickened "lips," while, in addition, the roughened surface of the inner vagina lips heightens pleasure during coitus, since the scarifications are not unlike the body cicatrizations.

Women informants were insistent, however, that the young girls were in no way made aware of this erotic purpose, and this was the more emphatically stated after the account of sex education given by the men was available and was drawn upon in discussion.¹ They denied with equal emphasis that the girls were taught by the instructress various copulatory positions, and insisted that the girls learned these from their husbands, or at any rate, from a man older than themselves.

Once the sex education of the girls is begun, they no longer go about the compound naked, with but a string of beads about their waists, but are given small cloths that reach from their waists to just above their knees. These cloths, together with the warnings they begin to hear at home and from their preceptress about avoiding hidden play with boys, awaken a feeling of self-consciousness, so that when they make for the place where the school is held they go furtively by the most roundabout way possible in order to avoid meeting their boy playmates. As this training continues the warnings both at home and at the school grow more frequent and sharper, until when menstruation comes they are definitely made aware of the unhappy consequences of becoming deflowered before marriage. Nevertheless, the women insist that the instruction is no more graphic than that. "It would be a scandal if young girls were taught sex behavior. They are told not to allow the boys to approach them sexually. If they were given the details of what the approach is, they would want to try."

¹ Obviously, the source of the information revealed in comments directing such conversation was never divulged.

Nevertheless, in more confidential conversation, it was laughingly asserted that many girls are better informed in these matters than they indicate on the first night of their marriage, that it is something of a game to feign innocence, and that sometimes young women who understand the relationship between men and women perfectly well, and who have even had sex experience, struggle and go through the motions of protest and surprise. At the same time, these informants were careful to indicate that many girls are in fact greatly disturbed by what takes place on the first night of marriage, and that there are some who actually run away from their husbands after their first sexual experience.¹

In further stressing the assertion that the instructress does not teach her charges the methods of copulation, the women pointed to another of her duties which is considered of importance in training the young girls for adult life. Mention has been made before that the girls, in following their mothers about, learn much of woman's work, and that even by the age of nine many of them are competent to do the household tasks about a compound, being only unable to wash the large men's cloths satisfactorily. Many of them have to be nursemaids and housekeepers at that age, while their mothers are away for days in some distant market trading, since during such absences they must care for younger brothers and sisters. Many of them help their mothers sell in the market-place, and others are supplied by their fathers with small stocks of sugar, or chewing sticks, or salt, and are sent to the market to sell these. The training up to this point is under the auspices of the girl's relatives. Now, with the beginning of their sex education, the preceptress also takes upon herself the encouragement of initiative in selling, awakening a greater interest in accomplishment not only because of the competition thus engendered, but also because the earnings of the girls that are thus derived are their own. With ingredients furnished by the parents, the instructress makes balls of *akásà* or other fried cakes, and dispatches the girls to dispose of them in the market-place, or to peddle them about the village. If they do not do well at this, she tries one article after another for each of them, such as providing them with a dozen squares of sugar, or some salt, or some chewing sticks. A change of article for sale is made without the reproach or ridicule that the girl might earn from her own relations in a

¹ In discussing with the Ashanti the matter of virginity as a desideratum in a bride and the inspection of the sleeping mat by relatives of bride and groom after the nuptial night, the point was brought out by women informants that women no longer virgins often apply ants to the vagina the day before marriage, so irritating the tissues by this means that sex contact brings on bleeding.

moment of impatience, but is done, on the contrary, with some explanation that is not intended to wound the girl's sensibilities. Nevertheless the one who does well is generously praised, and held up as an example.

Between the ages of nine and eleven—often until twelve and thirteen—small girls are largely freed from the tasks of helping their mothers, on market days at least, and under the tutelage of this instructress engage in trade. Her payment for this work is the pleasure she has in directing the girls, and the prestige this brings her in her community. Small, occasional gifts of tobacco or other non-essentials may be given her, but the work involves "so little time" that none of the informants could understand why it might be supposed that some remuneration could be due for such a task.

When the girls find themselves with others who have been given small cloths to wear, and with those older than themselves, they compare sex organs, each boasting of the size of the lips of her own. At times, when none of the older people are about, the girls may indulge in mutual masturbation. There is no formal carry-over into later life of the group educated together, however; that is, after the girls are married, they do not continue as a self-conscious social group, though occasionally two or three women who have been in the same "school" may meet to talk over old times. Though the girls are only under the active tutelage of the woman who is in charge of them for about two or three years, they are usually under her surveillance for two or three years more until they are married. The process of manipulation of the sex organ, which begins before the onset of menstruation, also continues more or less intermittently until marriage.

Both in the accounts of men and women the attainment of puberty marks a definite period in the life of a girl. The ceremonies that define this occasion will be given below; here one may note that the men in discussing sex education were unanimous in stating that sex-play such as has been described above ceases at this time. It is believed that were this to continue, there would be danger of conception, and hence the girls are withdrawn from the company of the young boys of their age and closely guarded. Most girls at the age of puberty are promised in marriage, and a father will not endanger a match he has arranged by exposing his daughter to a liaison with some boy of her own age, not her fiancé.¹

¹ It is customary to wait three years and longer after the onset of menstruation before marriage. The strictest practice demands a delay until a girl has passed forty-eight menstrual periods, for it is believed that if she goes to her husband before then, she will have difficult births, and her children will be weaklings.

The differences in the accounts given by men and women of the education of their own sex may be briefly commented upon. Each sex emphasized the fact that its education is had at the hands of members of the other. Both versions represented the view most prevalent among those of the respective sexes. The fact, of course, is that many girls learn the technique of sex from men or boys, and many boys learn from women or girls. That there is a definite institutionalisation of the girls' "school," where the manipulation of the sex organ takes place in preparation for marriage, and education in other phases of a woman's life is given—even if the techniques of sex-contact are not taught—is corroborated by both groups; that boys and girls play together during early adolescence and before the onset of puberty is also agreed upon; while that Dahomean boys and girls remain unaware of the detailed knowledge of sex until well into adolescence was substantially the opinion of all informants. This unanimity is undoubtedly to be looked upon as an expression of a social ideal, rather than as an unequivocal actuality. Nevertheless, that the number of those who are fully informed at adolescence is not more extensive is of interest in the light of the general view held of sexual behavior amongst African peoples. For the rest, it can be concluded that in Dahomey, as in other cultures, there is great variation in the manner in which an individual obtains his knowledge of the practices and dictates of his own culture.

Puberty ceremonies, as such, aside from the non-ceremonial circumcision operation, the filing of the teeth, and the giving of the facial "clan" cuts, are entirely lacking for boys; there is no initiation into manhood, no period of formal training and release, such as characterizes the cultures of certain other African peoples. It is only for the girls that such rites are held, and these, though they occur during the period when a girl is under the tutelage of her preceptress, have no connection with the "school" she is attending. The ceremony, indeed, would seem to be essentially a social one, as a description of the occasion indicates, since its only non-social element is the consultation of Destiny to determine whether good or bad fortune is in store for the girl.

Many of the girls know little about menstruation before they experience it; indeed, the fears of the young girls on the occasion of their first menstrual period were described at length by those who recalled their own terror at the phenomenon. This was one of the arguments brought forward by the women to indicate that girls could

not possibly instruct their male playmates in the technique of sex, for, declared these women, the girls are so impressed with the dangers to themselves in having the hymen broken before marriage, and the association of this occurrence with flowing blood is repeated so frequently to them, that they often try to conceal the fact of their nubility. Thus one case was recounted where the informant withheld knowledge of initial menstruation from her mother for four days, and only revealed it when her mother, thinking her ill, began to watch her movements anxiously. Another told that she was so frightened by these warnings, that she was afraid to sneeze lest this bring about a ruptured hymen. The question again arises concerning this ignorance among young women, since all adult women are segregated during the monthly catamenia. Yet it would seem that the ordinary manner in which this monthly withdrawal occurs, and the universality of the practice, causes it to be regarded as a matter of course, something never associated by an individual with the possibility of her future participation. Moreover, it is said that when talk about menstruation takes place among the women, the young girls do not grasp clearly what it involves. And though this, like the ignorance of sexual intercourse manifested by boys, would seem at first glance highly improbable, the evidence already presented in the case of the boys strengthens the credibility to be attached to the independent testimony of the women with whom the subject was discussed.

When the parents of the girl discover that her first period has come, she is seated on a mat of native make called *kpalakpálá*, and an *adjitò*—a game-board on which *adjí*¹ is played—is put before her. Friends come and play with her, and all who visit her as she sits there—that is, for the duration of her first period—must bring her a present of at least a few *sous*. In former days, as soon as the period was over, the girl was dressed in her finest cloths and sent to the market-place to buy presents for her father and mother. No ceremonial went with this visit to the market-place, and no sacrifice to the market *aizé* was given. This custom is apparently no longer followed. As soon as the girl is seated on the mat in her mother's house, the diviner is called to discover from Fate if any sacrifices are to be made, and to which of the ancestors or gods. Should Destiny reveal that evil is in store—for

¹ Six forms of this game are played in Dahomey, one of them being identical with the Gold Coast *wari*. For a description of this form, see Spieth (I), pp. 244-247, and Herskovits, M. J. (I and II).

example, should it indicate death for the girl—a goat is brought into the room where she sits. She is placed upon the back of the animal and is made to “ride” it, while a hole is dug inside the house where she had been seated on the mat. A stake is then planted in the hole, and the goat is impaled alive on this stake as a sacrifice. This rite is called *kúdíyódíyó*—the translation of the word, “change-death,” sufficiently explains its significance.

For her first three periods a girl remains in her mother's house, but thereafter she goes to the room in the compound that is reserved for the menstruating women of the household. The cloth which a girl wears while in her menstruous condition is washed and retained for use the month following. Any magic charms she wears must be removed before her period comes, nor will anyone with such charms approach too closely the room where these women are sheltered while menstruating. Young children go in and out of this room, but the women do not cook for their husbands (or their sons, if they are approaching puberty) while they are menstruating.

There are few occasions in the life of a boy or girl between the time of puberty and marriage which are marked by formal celebration. A girl who has reached puberty is called *díyóví*, being designated as a young woman; the boys become *dokpweví*, “sons of the *dókpwe*.” One situation which arises in the sex life of the boys during middle adolescence deserves some consideration, for it is at this time of life, when the young girls have been withdrawn from the boys of their age, that any tendencies to homosexuality develop; when, indeed, according to one account, homosexuality, which is ordinarily looked upon by the Dahomeans with distaste, is recognized as normal. Once the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendships between boys of the same group. These friendships, according to the account of men informants, develop in somewhat the following fashion: It sometimes happens that boys and girls are not equally paired in their nocturnal games, and, should there be more boys than girls, two youths must share the same girl. Even when there are the same number of both sexes, two couples may always be together and between them there may be a constant promiscuity, the two boys and girls interchanging partners from time to time. Thereupon, when normal sex satisfaction is later denied, one of these boys may take the other “as a woman,” this being called *gaglyó*, homosexuality. Sometimes an affair of this sort persists during the entire life of the pair,



a) A pair of twins grown to maturity.



b) This macrocephalic boy is regarded as a *toxus*, and is not ignored as he goes about asking for gifts.



a) A group of Dahomean children.



b) A young girl helps her mother as she is able. Carrying clay from the pit to the work-place of the potter.

but where such a relationship continues into later life, after what is regarded as the normal age for such diversions, these associations must be carefully concealed. This period of homosexuality plays a rôle in the later life of men, because it is said that not infrequently these adolescent experiences with members of the same sex constitute the basis for the formation of a "best" friendship.¹ During the period when a normal sex outlet is denied the boys, satisfaction is also obtained through masturbation. Mutual masturbation, as a matter of fact, is one method of homosexual experience, though solitary indulgence in this is looked upon as very bad, and it is said that a man who indulges himself alone in this way will become "like a dog." Homosexuality is found among women as well as men; by some it is claimed that it exists among women to a greater extent. When forced into marriage, women of this type often exhibit extreme frigidity.

Between the ages of twelve and fifteen a boy has one or two of his front upper teeth removed. No ceremony is attached to this operation, which is performed by a specialist called *adukató* ("teeth-break-person"), and is done for purely aesthetic reasons. There are style-preferences in this beautifying treatment, for some have one of the incisors removed, others have all the upper teeth filed down to a point, while still others have an inverted "V" filed between the upper incisors. Of a man who has not had this done it is said that "his oxen have horns that are not separated."

By the time a boy is fifteen or sixteen he will, with the help of his friends, have built a small house in the compound of his father. He works in his father's fields in the mornings and early afternoons, and during his free time he cultivates a field of his own, which is called *bádáglè*, evening field. It is this time in a boy's life that he is given his "partial" Fá. Especially if he falls ill or is sickly as he is apt to be at this age of early adolescence, his father consults a diviner regarding him, and it is usually found that his Fate is troubling him, wishing to be "established" and worshipped individually. He cannot as yet know his complete Destiny, but only the portion that is made available to young men.² It is also at this time that a boy who wishes to follow some occupation other than that of his father makes known his desire. If his father approves, he goes as apprentice to someone who will take him, though he does not necessarily desert his hereditary calling, especially if his father is a farmer, since no Dahomean man ever

¹ See above, pp. 239 ff.

² See below, vol. ii, p. 218.

ceases to farm. Also, at this time of life, he and his friends form a society. He continues to obtain his food from his mother until he has a wife to cook for him. This does not mean that he is shut off from a normal sex life, however, for though he is not permitted the company of girls of his own age, he now has "affairs" with older women who enjoy relations with young men. He may go to some married woman who has indicated her willingness to receive him; or he may be approached by one of the many "free" women who form an important part of Dahomean society; or, if he so desires, he may satisfy himself by going to a prostitute.

Chapter XV

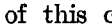
CICATRIZATION AND CIRCUMCISION

In the foregoing chapter, the development of the Dahomean boy and girl has been followed from birth to the age of marriage. Two pre-marital practices have, however, been reserved for separate treatment here. These relate to the custom of cicatrization of the girls and circumcision of the boys.¹ It must be pointed out at the outset that it is doubtful whether these operations are to be regarded as ordeals, or even vestigial survivals of ordeals, for no expression of native opinion justifies this conclusion. The view of cicatrization is that it is an enhancement of the erotic zones, the patterns themselves affording aesthetic pleasure, and the raised surfaces of the skin formed by the keloids making for pleasurable excitement in sex play.² In the case of circumcision, the feeling prevails that this is practised primarily for hygienic reasons. Indeed, it is not absolutely necessary that a boy or a girl undergo the pain of these operations, although one who has refused to do so is not looked upon as a desirable mate. That there are actually those who will not submit is soon discovered when the matter is discussed, for boys who have not been circumcized are often laughingly indicated by name. In the case of girls, however, this is not so easy, since, as will be shown, choice may dictate any amount of cicatrization from a few cuts to the complete set of designs.

¹ The existence of circumcision in Dahomey is well known, being commented on by Bosman (p. 329), Dalzel, (Introduction, p. xviii), Burton, (Vol. ii, p. 105), Skertchly, (p. 500), and Le Herissé (pp. 232-233). Burton sees in the manipulation of the lips of the vagina a ceremony similar for girls to circumcision for boys, speaking of it (*loc. cit.*) as follows: "The sister operation, excision, wonderful to say, is entirely unknown; the reverse being so much the custom that a woman in the natural state is derided by others. The artiste is some ancient sage femme, and the effect is an exaggeration of that which particularized the Hottentot Venus dissected by Cuvier."

² This type of cicatrization is not to be confused with the cuts given to indicate membership in a religious cult-group (see below, vol. ii, pp. 183 ff., and Foa, pp. 163-164), nor with the sib and tribal cuts, such as have been commented on above (p. 162), or as described by Dalzel (p. xviii, Introduction). It is further to be noted that special cuts containing magical properties may also be given to cure illness, or to protect one who goes on a long journey.

The manner in which cicatrization is done may first be considered.¹ Ordinarily, the cuts are given a girl shortly after her first menstruation. At this age, she is usually already betrothed, and her fiancé, who defrays the expenses of the operation, comes with his friends and hers. They watch the operation and give the girl money to "heal the wounds" as they watch. It is a festive occasion, for girls of a given quarter who have arrived at the proper age are brought together and the cuts are made by a specialist on all of them at the same time. A knife of native manufacture, called *kisí*, is used by him for this purpose. The exact date when these girls are to be given their cuts is determined by a diviner. Food is offered to *Ləgbá*, who receives his sacrifices before all other gods, and to *Gũ*, the god of iron, that this deity who controls the knife may not allow evil to result from the operation.

Twelve sets of cuts constitute a complete cicatrization, and the names, designs, and locale of each complex are generally known. The first to be cut are those above the bridge of the nose. They form a horizontal zigzag line of this character, , called *nukpsti* ("there-one sees-place"). After this another zigzag line is traced obliquely above the three marks known as the "Gədevi cuts," which themselves give tribal identification to those who are descendants of the original inhabitants of the plateau of Abomey. These second cuts are called *djixosè* ("rain-wet-straw"—"straw" signifying the hair), and they are placed near the hair in order to emphasize its beauty. Above these and behind them are two very fine parallel slanting cuts called *tádù* ("head-word"). These second and third sets of cuts appear as follows:

The reason for the name given these markings is that when a man talks with a woman who loves him, these cuts become livid and "there is a temporary headache"; the man sees them pulsate "like the heart" and in this way can know whether the woman feels affection for him or not. The next cut given is called *akabà* ("you-seek") or *gbugbómì* ("suck-myself," that is, "kiss me"). This consists of a circle about as large as the tip of the index finger, placed on the left cheek. "It is here that a man kisses a girl."

¹ Foá, pp. 163 and 164, apparently has these decorative cuts in mind in his discussion, but wrongly indicates the age at which they are given as early infancy.

The next series is cut on the back at a point that is, roughly speaking, over the third vertebra. Three rows of three horizontal marks each are ordinarily cut, though some make fifteen incisions, and others twenty-four. Their usual appearance is $\equiv \equiv \equiv$. They are called *meftó le kpq* ("man-go-he-who-does-turn-look"), and the explanation given for their location is that when a woman loved by a man leaves him to return to her house, and he, going his way, turns and looks back at her, it is these cuts that he sees; hence their name of "the ones that, at parting, cause the man to turn back and look." Finally, in this first group, three horizontal cuts are made on each side of the neck. When they are healed they form stripes about an inch long, and are called *kodjéq* ("neck-good-to-touch"); when a man embraces a woman he caresses these cicatrizations.

If when the first group of cuts is complete the girl is unable to undergo additional pain, the operator stops and the cicatrizations are allowed to develop, the cutting being resumed the following year. However, it must be remembered that the girl who is being operated on is supported by the presence of her fiancé, friends and relatives, and this audience constitutes a challenge to continue. No small measure of prestige accrues to a girl who accepts this challenge and permits the completion of all the cuts.

Cuts are next made over the base of the spine, with the choice of design resting with the individual girl. There are many patterns from which she may make her selection, for this set of cuts is an important one. If older people are not present when the cutting is done, the spectators call out the names of the designs they think should be placed there. These cuts are known as *alimexwe* ("loins-place-cicatrizations"), or *gblimè* ("pass-over"), this last term being derived from the fact that in sex-play a man passes his hands over them. The eighth set are placed on the inside of the thighs, and are the cuts which are most immediately concerned with sex excitation. For this series, the operator makes a total of eighty-one cuts on the inside of each thigh, there being nine rows of nine small horizontal cuts each. These are called *domidó* or *zidó*, both words having the meaning of "push me." It is said that if a woman does not have these cuts, she will never be able to hold a man's love.

The men who are lovers or fiancés of the girls receiving the cuts "share the fire of the knife" with them. It is said that the cuts "burn"; therefore, to share this "fire" they ask to have three small cuts made on the arm or face or body so that they, too, can feel such pain as the

girls are undergoing during these operations. The places where these cuts are taken by the men vary; one man, for example, stated that he preferred to have his made on the chest, and since he had been married a number of times and was renowned for his amorous adventures, he exhibited many such scars. When the cutting has progressed to the point of making the cicatrizations on the inside of the thighs, the operator attempts to drive away the men who are watching. The occasion is, however, one of merriment, and the men return again and again, often finally winning their point of remaining to see what they regard as a spectacle they are not to be deprived of. In keeping with the rôle of the keloids as aids to stimulating the sex impulse, there is much lascivious reference in the speech of those present, and the banter is charged with sexual innuendo. This is consciously indulged in, and is so interpreted in terms of the Dahomean culture. As the cuts become more and more painful, a girl often cries out to her friends to hold her, and they not only do this, but a fiancé or a lover will at such times add gifts of money and cloths to distract her.

A strong-minded girl will make every effort to support the pain of the full series of cuts at one sitting. This fortitude is something to be remembered and mentioned in later years, and a man who is the fiancé or lover of such a girl is exceedingly proud of her if she exhibits such bravery, though it is admitted that sober experience shows that a woman who has achieved this does not permit her husband to overlook the fact in later years. The usual break is after the eighth set of cuts, allowing the girls a year within which to treat them before further cuts are made. Continuing later, in such instances, come the ninth series which are cut on the back of the left hand; six incisions forming an hour-glass design, which is called *sifánú* ("water-drink-milk") — Σ . The name derives from such situations as this, which occur between lovers; when a man visits his girl and her relatives are present so that he cannot embrace her, she takes a ball of *akásà* which, when put into a calabash of water to which sugar has been added, becomes the color of milk. As she stirs the drink with her hand the cicatrization is whitened by the liquid. She later uses the other hand to give the drink to the man, holding the first one at her side, so that he may bend down and kiss the cuts. A design under the navel is next made, called *adomehwè* ("stomach-over cuts"). The design may be chosen by the girl, and is often an outlined representation of a lizard or some other animal. If the girl wishes, another design may be cut over the navel at the same time, but this is regarded as being a part of the same

series, and is called by the same name. The eleventh set consists of three parallel rows of cuts about one inch in length over the shoulders. These are called *abotáhwè* ("shoulder-cuts"). The last design is placed between the breasts, and often takes the form of a series of links or of straight lines radiating from a central point.

There is the variation that might be expected, both in the number of cuts given at any one time and the order in which the designs are placed on the body. One alternate list may be quoted. In the case of one woman, the cicatrizations were made a few at a time and in the following order: The arms, the forehead, the perpendicular lines between the eyes, the lines on the temple, on the cheeks, on the neck, between the eyes, on the chest, at the back of the neck, at the base of the spine, on the lower abdomen, and finally on the thighs.

The cicatrizations are usually made during August, which is the height of the rainy season and the period when the temperature is lowest. It is believed that if cicatrizations are made during the dry season (when the heat is most intense), infections will set in that will result in small-pox. Once made, it is necessary to irritate the cuts, in order that the keloids which develop from scar-tissue may stand out from the rest of the skin. For this purpose an irritant composed of a leaf called *azômâ* which is crushed to form a compound with soot and palm-oil, is employed. Three days after the cuts have been made, this mixture is rubbed into the wounds daily, and the resulting irritation causes the formation of the desired keloids. During the time that the cuts are healing the friends of the girls, both men and women, come to visit and amuse them.

The time for circumcising the boys occurs traditionally between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. However, this rule, which was rigidly followed during pre-conquest times, is honored today as much in the breach as in the observance. Contact with European cultures, especially with European medical knowledge, has resulted in circumcision being more often performed at the hospital at Abomey shortly after the birth of a child than during the traditionally sanctioned age, just before marriage. Thus, several women stated that they had had their sons circumcised at the hospital when they were only a few weeks old. As on all other occasions of any importance, a diviner is consulted before the operation is performed. One woman was told by her diviner to obtain a large calabash of palm-oil and to open her eyes in the oil—presumably to immerse her face in it, eyes open—and having done this, to throw it away at the cross-roads. After these instructions had

been complied with, the boy was taken to the hospital. The prescribed sacrifice as dictated by Fate does, of course, vary from case to case; in some instances there are deities to whom offerings must be given. When a baby is operated upon at the hospital, no ceremony is performed.

The following account of the manner in which circumcision is done on a boy of adolescent age was given by women informants, and may be presented before the version obtained from men is recounted. The boys of a village who are to be operated on are gathered in one compound, usually that of the man who is to be the operator. Each is seated naked, with legs outstretched, before a small hole dug in the earth, the organ resting in the hole. Any charms which boys have on their persons are removed before the operation. The ceremony is public, and friends and relatives stand about teasing the boys and joking with them, in order to dissipate any squeamishness, and more than that, to make them ashamed of showing fear. The operation is performed either with a sharp knife of native manufacture or a European razor, the instrument not being regarded as of ceremonial significance. The operator, according to this account, goes through some horse-play with the boys before he actually operates. He may, for example, take hold of the foreskin and tug at it, all the while watching his charge to see if the boy is nervous; and then tug harder still, or he will place the knife on the thigh of his subject, and look into his face to see if he shows fear. Meanwhile the bystanders fire a barrage of teasing exclamations, and otherwise impress on the boy the matter-of-factness of the operation. Finally the specialist takes hold of the foreskin, tugs at it several times, and then severs it with one stroke, letting the blood and the prepuce fall into the hole. The operator has medicine at hand to stanch the flow of blood if a severe hemorrhage ensues. When bleeding ceases, the operator pinches the organ so that scar-tissue does not form, and the boy is taken home. A boy who shows great courage and insists that he does not wish to be held during the operation enjoys much prestige among his group, and is not unlikely to swagger a bit for some time after. Ordinarily, two men are beside each boy, holding his shoulders to steady him. The wound is washed on the third day, and again the organ is pinched so that undue scarification will not occur, and this is repeated daily until the wound is healed. The operation is performed even if a boy shows great fear, but in such a case he is held by men who are there for this purpose. The boys receive no new name after circumcision, nor does

the hole that receives the blood and the foreskin have any ceremonial significance for them. However, before the operation is performed, each family makes whatever sacrifices are prescribed by their diviner, giving the offerings to those deities indicated by him as the proper ones to receive them. All the family gods are given food as well, and asked to watch over the life of the boy. The healing process is a matter of thirty days or more, if rapid, or about three months if recovery is slow, and it is said that an appreciable mortality is attendant on circumcision.

The type of circumcision most highly sanctioned by tradition, namely, that done at the age of seventeen or nineteen, was performed at the command of the King, whose order was transmitted to the young men by one of his chiefs. The ceremony itself is today much as that which has been described for adolescent boys, though in this case the young men continue to live together, not resuming their places in the everyday round of life until all are cured. This is because a cure makes a young man eligible for marriage, and it is felt desirable that the entire group be cured before measures looking to marriage are taken for any one of their number. After the cure has been effected, a final ceremony is essential before the patients are discharged. Women whose husbands are dead, and who have reached their menopause are found, to have first intercourse with the young men after their recovery. These women are given many gifts, for it is believed that what they do is so dangerous that it may even involve death. Obviously, it is not a simple matter to find someone who fulfils the requirements and who is willing to go through the experience, and it invariably happens that the woman is unknown to the young man, who never sees her again. There is no conscious identification of this act with a purposeful desire to assure the youths of their potency, or to initiate them in the performance of the sex act under circumstances which will not involve any emotions arising from incompetence. Rather it is stated that this act takes away "the burn of the knife." Should a young man not have his first sex-contact after circumcision with such a woman, then the first woman with whom he did have connection would be unable to bear children. This, again, is not to be taken as any indication that this semi-ceremonial intercourse has significance as a fertility rite, for no special care is taken to find a woman who has been fortunate in child-bearing. It was pointed out that the existence of this custom does not contradict the assertions that early sex experience is had by adolescent boys, for it is not

expected in their case that they be circumcised. However, persons of both sexes stated that women look with distaste upon connection with a man who has attained the age of circumcision but who has not been operated upon, believing that there is an element of uncleanness which makes the experience an unpleasant one.

The accounts of circumcision given by men show a certain amount of disagreement with the above, though at no crucial point is there lack of accord with what has been stated. All agree that since the conquest, boys are often circumcised at a very early age, and, as has been stated, there is also agreement that a man who has not been circumcised is looked upon with disfavor by women because he is regarded as unclean. Accounts given by men of pre-conquest customs distinguish between observances in the cases of princes and in those of commoners, and this may explain the fact that at the present time circumcision is performed at the age of adolescence as well as at the traditional age. While the kingdom existed, princes were circumcised at the ages of twelve, thirteen, or fourteen years, and, since the members of the royal family are most meticulous in preserving time-honored customs, this still holds for boys of royal blood. Princes are married earlier than commoners, possibly because of the fact that the royal family, having large means, can furnish princes with wives at an age when marriage would be out of the question for the child of the commoner. However, circumcision of the boys of the royal house has never been a public ceremony, for the operation is performed on them without witnesses being present. No food is given to ancestors or gods, but one day, without much preparation, a specialist is called and the circumcision is performed. The operator is given such gifts as the family deem appropriate, and he attends the boy until a cure has been effected. Whether or not the ceremony of having intercourse with an older woman is performed by princes was not stated, but it was indicated that a prince receives his first wife as soon as the wound is healed.

In the case of commoners, who, according to male informants, were circumcised when they reached the age of about seventeen or eighteen years, marriage was permissible three months after the operation. Today, in the cases of boys who have not been circumcised while infants, the day is designated by the diviner, and if the lots show that sacrifices must be given, they are offered to the deities named. Food is also given to all the ancestors, that they may assure the success of the operation. The young men are placed in a row, as described in the

above account, small holes being dug in front of each to receive the foreskin and the blood as they sit with outstretched legs. The men, however, stated that the knife must be of native manufacture. The operation is performed at the home of the one who operates, and the boys remain with him all the three months necessary to effect a cure. This man, called *adâgbwotó* ("penis-cut-man"), has a special place in his compound where the operation is performed. The wound is washed with hot water and soap, and as it heals the irritation is soothed and scratching prevented by causing the young men to sit on the ground before piles of hot sand in which the member is buried. After three months, the heads of the youths are completely shaved. They wash the cloths they have worn while convalescing, and give these to the operator with one cock, one chicken and 7.50 francs each as payment, and are free to go to their homes. This version also stresses the necessity for intercourse with an old woman before those circumcised may be married, it being agreed that she must have passed the age of child bearing. According to this account, intercourse with her is necessary to "cool the heat of the razor," though no mention was made of any danger to her as a result of this sex-contact.

A strong friendship develops among those who have spent this period together, and they regard themselves as "brothers by the same knife," who must not, therefore, think evil of one another. Even if one of the young men is a stranger to the others before he comes to be operated on, the common experience he has gone through with them makes for lasting ties. Should these others all belong to a certain society, it is said the stranger will be made a member of it. It is more than likely that this represents an idealized account rather than a statement of what actually occurs. That friendships do result among those who have been members of the same circumcising group is doubtlessly true, however, for numerous instances of these were named by those with whom this ceremony was discussed.

When the girls have been cicatrized and the boys circumcised, they are ready for marriage, though, as previously stated, in the instance of the girl forty-eight menstrual periods should be reached before it takes place, in order to assure healthy offspring.

Chapter XVI

MARRIAGE

The extent of plural marriage in Dahomey makes it necessary to consider the problem of the manner in which a sex ratio is maintained to allow a man a large number of wives. If it be assumed that the birth-rate for boys and girls is about the same, it is obvious that in a culture where some men number their wives by the tens, and where the majority of those married have two or more spouses, a large number of men must go unmarried.¹ In an attempt to solve this problem it was possible only to obtain two scraps of evidence—both merely suggestive—which seemed to indicate the need for investigating this particular point, with the possibility in mind that among Negroes a slightly larger number of females are born than males. In Allada, where the supervision of a resident European official over the natives was sufficiently close to make it reasonably certain that all births were recorded as required, the one hundred and forty-seven births that occurred between January 1 and June 6, 1931 numbered fifty-three males and ninety-four females. This number is small, but it gains some validity from the figures of the 1931 census of the canton of Abomey, where of eighty-three thousand six hundred and forty-five inhabitants enumerated, forty-five thousand three hundred and twenty, or fifty-four percent, were women; though this count, made by native officials, is admittedly inaccurate.

The Dahomeans with whom this problem was discussed admitted that they themselves were at a loss for an explanation. Some observed that before the conquest the matter was complicated by the large numbers of women recruited for the army as "Amazons" (as they are termed in the literature), to whom sex relations were prohibited on

¹ That polygyny on a grand scale has been practised since early days is evident from reading the works of the early explorers—cf. Bosman, p. 320, and Smith, p. 202—even allowing for exaggerations dictated by naïveté. See also Le Herissé, p. 224, on this point.

the penalty of death for themselves and for the men found with them. It was suggested by Dahomeans, however, that in pre-conquest days, the large number of soldiers stationed at the royal palaces, and the men who died during the annual campaigns carried on by the King of Dahomey made the difference between the numbers of each sex sufficiently disparate to permit plural marriage. It was also stated that the proportion of unmarried men is large, although if such exist in any numbers, they were not encountered.¹ That the problem of accounting for the carrying on of a system of polygynous mating in a society where male infanticide is not practised is not solved by these explanations is self-evident, and that male infanticide, as such, is not a custom of Dahomean culture is attested by the initial horror and later amusement which greeted a suggestion that this might make for a difference in sex ratio, and might account for the holding of numerous wives by a single individual.

The Dahomeans recognize thirteen different categories of marriage, thirteen different sets of situations in which mating may be achieved.² Actually, these forms may be regarded as specialized sub-types of either one or the other of two principal forms of marriage. Thus, five of the first six are to be thought of, in one sense, as derivatives of the sixth, and the remaining types as forming the other general category. The French-speaking native denominates these two principal divisions of marriage types as "legitimate" and "illegitimate". The real significance of such classification, however, is revealed in the F₂ terms for the marriage types which occur most frequently in each category, those in the first being called *akwénúsi*, "money-with-woman," and in the second *xadudó*, "friend-custody."³ The point of divergence, then, turns on the fact that marriages in the former category carry an obligation for the bridegroom to give to the father of his wife those traditional payments which, in turn, give him control of the children born of the marriage, while in the latter category these obligations are not assumed and, though the children are members of the sib of

¹ The point made by Smith (*loc. cit.*), may have direct bearing on the solution of this problem as far as early times are concerned: "Besides, as the Riches of a Man is the Number of his Children, and which he can dispose of at Pleasure, except his Eldest Son, and the Males being frequently sold into Slavery, and this small Spot of Ground [i. e., Whydah] furnishes One Thousand Slaves every Month for the Market. Women must be Plenty, and each Man must have a Number."

² The applicability of Burton's remark (vol. ii, p. 105) "The Dahoman marriage is somewhat complicated" will become evident as this discussion proceeds.

³ One informant stated a "legitimate" wife was one who might be brought before the court of the King; an "illegitimate" wife one who could not be.

their father, control over them remains in the hands of their mother or of her people.¹

Because of the numerous forms of marriage, the list of terms by which they are designated with the literal translation of each term may be given at the outset of this consideration :

I. *Marriages where control of the children is vested in the father.*

1. *Akwénúsi*, "money-with-woman" (the basic type of this division).
2. *Asidjòsi*, "woman-give-back-woman."
3. *Vibióbiò*, "child-ask-ask."
4. *Namímanawè*, "give-us-we-give-you."
5. *Tochési*, "father-my-wife."
6. *Adomevodidà*, "stomach-empty-marriage."

II. *Marriages where control of children is vested in the mother.*

7. *Xadudò*, "friend-custody."
8. *Gbəsúdónégbəsì*, "goat-male-confide-goat-female."
9. *Vidòtchwé*, "child-stay-father-house."
10. *Vidòkpokátá*, "child-father-threshold-over."
11. *Chíosì*, "dead-man-woman."
12. *Avonúsi*, "cloth-with-woman."
13. *Azovivi*, "prince-child-child."

One general principle which obtains for all types of marriages is that, as willed by the ancestors, a man may never refuse a woman offered him; just as it will be seen when divorce is discussed, that divorce must always be initiated by the family of the wife. Proposals looking to marriage are commonly made to the man on behalf of the woman, and when a woman who does not please a man is offered him, he must resort to subterfuge and beg a delay in making his decision, on the ground that the proposal so flatters him that he must have time to consider whether he can deem himself worthy of the honor; or he makes the request to consult his diviner. A direct refusal is regarded as not only boorish, but as dangerous to his potency. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that a hint of this kind is always taken by the proposer of the match.

As stated, the *akwénúsi* marriage may be regarded as a basic type, of which the other so-called "legitimate" forms constitute sub-

¹ Le Herissé, p. 203, makes the same division of marriage-types, stating, "Les unions pratiquées dans le royaume d'Abomey se ramènent à deux genres suivant qu'elles donnent la puissance sur les enfants à la famille paternelle ou à la famille maternelle."

types.¹ Because of its importance, the manner in which such a marriage is arranged and consummated must be considered first. The case may be assumed of a father who has a marriageable daughter and finds a man he thinks suitable as a husband for her. He goes to this man, and telling him that he would like to have him for a son-in-law, asks him to consult his diviner to determine if his Destiny favors the match. He has already assured himself that there is no supernatural obstacle in the way by consulting his own diviner before he has approached this proposed husband for his daughter, having indeed presented this diviner with the names of several men to whom he would be willing to see his daughter married, so as to ascertain which of these are acceptable.² If the man to whom the proposal is made finds that his own Destiny does not favor it, the match cannot be consummated, and the father thereupon proposes the marriage to another of those concerning whom the answer of Destiny had been propitious. If the man to whom the match has been proposed receives the approval of his Destiny to the marriage, he pays a visit to the father of the girl, accompanied by two women and two older men of his own family, and brings with him a sack of maize or millet, money to the amount of 5.50 francs, which custom demands (though he may give as much more as he wishes), about one kilogram of tobacco, two packages of matches or, in pre-European times, a calabash of *ḍskwě*, bamboo tinder, and drinks, which in former times would have been the native beverage, *kixà*, "millet-drink," but since the time of King Gezo consist of European beverages.³ When the father of the girl receives these gifts he divides them as follows: the tobacco and matches are distributed among the principal members of the sib, the drinks go as libations to the ancestors, the sack of cereal is given to the mother of the girl, and the money is kept for himself.⁴

¹ Le Herissé gives a brief description of the *akwénfisi* marriage (pp. 203-209), designating it with the term given in this account to a portion of the actual ceremony of marriage, "*hon-gbo*, couper le nombril." His version, though agreeing in general outline with that given here, varies as largely in detail as it does in designation.

² It may be indicated that a favorable reply from his own Fate would be regarded as being favorable for his daughter, since a woman participates in the Destiny of her father until her marriage, and in that of her husband thereafter. See below, vol. ii, p. 219.

³ Le Herissé lists (p. 206) the gifts presented at this time as "6 fr. 50; un pagnon nommé 'adjoko' . . . ; une mesure de petit mil ou de maïs suivant les régions, plus un franc." He also adds, "Le versement des 6 fr. 50 est la chose important; on appelle cette somme 'l'argent de la femme' (*asi-koué*) . . . C'est aussi à cause du versement de ces 6 fr. 50 qu'on appelle encore la 'hongbosi,' une 'femme pour de l'argent' (*akouénou'si*)."⁴ This last sentence reconciles Le Herissé's nomenclature with that employed here.

⁴ Cf. Burton, vol. ii, pp. 105-106.

The man is now definitely betrothed to the girl, and must begin to perform the duties he owes to her family as a prospective son-in-law. He must provide a plentiful supply of firewood for the mother of his betrothed, bringing or sending it two or three times a month. When the time of planting approaches, the girl's father will call upon his prospective son-in-law to work his field, that is to say, to summon a *dókpwè* to clear or hoe a field. If the house of the girl's mother is in need of repair, her daughter's fiancé is called upon to repair it, and once more he will come with his *dókpwè*. This latter service is, however, not obligatory and is performed largely as a matter of regard, but also because it is politic to have the good will of the mother of his fiancée, since a mother's influence on her daughter can do much to make or mar the later relationship between himself as husband, and the girl as his wife. Moreover, while courting the girl, he often goes to her mother's house and while there shares many meals with her family; if he is courting his first wife, his visits will be frequent indeed. At the same time, until the marriage is consummated, a man keeps careful account of what he has expended in the discharge of such obligations, noting the number of times he came at the call of his fiancée's parents, what he provided in the way of gifts, and above all, where the use of a *dókpwè* is involved, the number of men he brought with him to perform each task. This is done in order that should the girl elope with another man, or for any reason refuse to go through with the marriage, he will know what amount to claim in compensation.

The most serious expenditures that a fiancé or son-in-law must make however, are in connection with the funeral ceremonies of closely related members of the woman's family, and no account of marriage and its obligations would be complete without an indication of the manner in which this obligation must be discharged.¹ When a death occurs, so important are the duties of a relative-in-law, actual or prospective, held to be, that the penalty for failure to perform them is immediate divorce if the marriage has taken place, or a breaking off of the engagement, if the girl has not yet come to live in his compound.

When a death occurs in the family of the girl's father, the fiancé or husband receives a message in the name of the sib-head, stating that "fire has fallen on the roof of my house,"² and calling on the

¹ It must also be recognized that a similar obligation rests on the woman in the event of a death in the family of her fiancé or husband.

² This is a familiar Dahomean figure of speech. Norris (p. 18) tells how Kpengla, when giving orders for a conquest, sent word to his commander "that his house wanted thatch."



Front and rear views of a brass figure on which cicatrizations are represented.



Dahomean chiefs and some of their younger and more favored wives.

recipient to bring *ayákpó*¹ to quench the fire. The messenger is asked how much *ayákpó* is needed to put out the blaze, and the number mentioned represents the number of francs requested. It is customary to give only about half of the amount asked. The son-in-law does not discharge his duty with this gift alone, but must send money and small cloths on the day of the burial, and must himself be present at the funeral rites. If the death is that of the father or mother of a fiancée, and occurs before the girl has come to the house of the man she is to marry, then he must also provide his fiancée with the ritual drink of fermented corn mixed with corn-flour that replaces the usual cake of cornmeal given, but not eaten, on the day of the burial. The messenger is sent a second time to sons-in-law and fiancés, and this time receives many cloths, and whatever else a fiancée or spouse needs for the ceremony. To give a native cloth called *kpokú*, and another termed *adó* (the kind in which the cadaver is wrapped) is especially important, for should a son-in-law fail to give these, his wife is not permitted to return to him after the funeral, or, if a man is not yet married, his fiancée is refused him. It is also obligatory to give a small native cloth called *adjókò*, and a narrow cloth strip named *awidó*, which is used as a belt. Finally, on the day of burial, each son-in-law and fiancé must bring a funerary drum known as *zélí*.² Further, in addition to paying funeral duties, sons- and daughters-in-law figure largely in making greater the display of wealth that constitutes a part of the funeral service. Thus, on the morning after actual burial, each person married or engaged to a member of the family of the deceased summons the members of the society, the *gbě*, to which he belongs, to come and help him do his share in making the display which the occasion demands.³ At least three months must elapse after

¹ *kpo*, wood; *ayá*, a kind of tree used in beating out fires.

² This drum is of pottery, and is struck with an instrument made from the dried skin of a bullock. It is obtained from the *dokpwégbé*, and is accompanied by that official and his *dókpwè*. As will be seen in the discussion of funerary rites, the number of *zélí* at a funeral is an important index of the social position of the family of the deceased, and it is because of this fact that it is so important for every son- and daughter-in-law, as well as for every man betrothed to a woman of the family of the deceased, to provide such a drum with its complement of singers at the funeral.

³ This is one reason why it is of such importance for an individual to belong to a mutual aid society, for the sons-in-law compete with each other, as do the daughters-in-law among themselves, in the lavishness of the display each makes at this time. If a person belongs to no society, therefore, when an occasion such as this arises, he will have only his immediate relatives and such friends as he can summon to his aid to support him, while others married to members of his spouse's family will be able to draw for aid on the large numbers of persons who compose some of these societies. See above, pp. 250-252.

the funeral of a father or mother before the marriage of a betrothed girl may take place; and in the case of married women, the same period must pass before a wife may be returned to her husband.

When the family of the girl are satisfied that all obligations have been fulfilled, a formal request is made by the man that his fiancée be sent to his house, and the head of the girl's sib thereupon orders the marriage ceremony to be performed. On this occasion, the man brings the sib-head—not the father of the girl—seven hundred and twenty caury-shells, one large man's cloth, one woman's cloth, a sack of salt, and a castrated goat ten or twelve years old, that stands about two feet in height.¹ The sib-head accepts the goat for the *tshwiyô*² of his sib, informing the spirit as he sacrifices it that one of his daughters is to be married. The salt, which is of great importance, since more than any other one element it serves to establish the marriage in the *akwénýsì* class, is given to the household. The cauries are thrown by the sib-head into the house where the ancestral shrines are kept so they may be of use to the ancestors "for the purchase of goods in the markets of the dead." The large man's cloth goes to the father of the girl, if he is alive; otherwise it is given to this man's eldest living brother. It is said that this cloth serves to replace the one on which the bride's parents lay the night when the father caused his wife to conceive the child who is herself about to be married. The small woman's cloth is given to the mother of the girl, and this is said to replace the one she used when she carried her daughter as a baby on her back. These payments are called *xýghbô* and are always recalled in the event of divorce or, as in situations to be discussed later, where the amount expended by a man must be returned to him.³

This ceremonial over, the man returns to his home. There he takes an *axô* basket, used to carry cloths, and into this basket he puts as many women's cloths as he can afford, and, in addition, some small cloths, beads (of the kind worn about the waist), kerchiefs, and almond perfume called *adimýghwe*. The following night, the head of the man's sib designates two men and two women to carry this basket to the father of the bride. When they arrive they say, "The head of our sib sends us with this basket to tell you that he is hungry. At his home

¹ Le Herissé's "deuxième groupe de cadeaux" (p. 206), which corresponds to this, comprises "680 cauris, prix du 'hongbo', qu'accompagnent une grande calebasse de sel, une mesure de petit mil ou de maïs, du tabac et 2 fr. 50."

² See above, pp. 158-160.

³ Reference may be made once more to Le Herissé's use of this term to designate the *akwénýsì* marriage.

he has cereals and yams, but there is no one to prepare them for him. He asks that you send him a woman." The girl is thereupon called, but does not respond, for good form demands that the girl act as though she were bashful and reluctant to leave her mother. While they wait, the four visitors are given food, and when they have finished someone enters to tell them that their woman is lost, and that they must give a gift so that searchers may be dispatched to search for her. The sum of 5.50 francs, the customary fixed amount, is given and in a few moments they are informed that the lost one has been found.

Now the principal members of the collectivity where the girl lives assemble, and the prospective son-in-law, who has arrived in the meantime, displays everything that he has brought, placing each group of articles in a separate pile to the right of where he is standing. At his left the family heap the belongings of the girl,¹ the purpose of this being to demonstrate to her fiancé how good a worker she is. First of all the cloths that she owns and that she has purchased with money she herself has earned, are exhibited. Her beads, her dishes—calabashes in the olden days—and her cooking utensils are also included in this group of objects. In the center, before the bridegroom, are exhibited the gifts given the girl by her father, among these being cloths, calabashes, plates, and money.² When the gifts have been displayed, an *akovi*, one of the old women of the girl's sib who plays an important rôle in the ancestral cult, blesses the girl and asks the man to care for her. She says,

"My girl, you are going to be married. You will bear sons who in time to come will watch over the family of your husband, and the sib of his father. You will bear daughters who will leave you to marry into other sibs, and they will spread among those to whom they go the name of the sib to which you belong. We hope to see born of you a child who, one day, will increase the sib which you are leaving. May your husband love you always, and may you never be ill while you are with him. May you be well cared for, and may you carry the children of your grandchildren in your arms. In the name of our ancestors, I bless you."

With this she throws water on the ground, and retires.

The couple are now ready to leave for the home of the bridegroom. If the husband is already married, then on their arrival the bride goes

¹ It may be noted here that a girl owes no duties to the family of her fiancé other than her obligations in the event of the death of one of his immediate relatives, since she is given to him outright.

² This represents the father's gifts to his daughter on this occasion, and does not include such gifts as he may have made to the girl earlier in her life.

to the house of her husband's first wife; if she herself is his first wife, she goes to his mother's house, and even though she goes to her husband's first wife, his mother accompanies her. When she leaves her paternal compound, the young girls of her own family and her unmarried friends, girls of her own age, form her escort. On her arrival at her husband's compound, she is given a dish of beans to eat, and, when night falls, she retires with the women of her husband's household. She remains there until the next day, when her friends come to greet her. Among these are the young women of her own age who are already married, her other married friends, and her relatives.

That night she first goes to her husband, spending the night with him. Her own mother and her husband's mother are both present, for these two must keep the marriage watch. The next morning the husband sends to her father the mat on which the marriage was consummated, if the girl was proved a virgin; if the man had had sexual relations with her before these final ceremonies, he must have kept the cloth on which they slept to send to his father-in-law at this time. If the girl was not a virgin, her father is notified, and she is compelled to tell with what man or men she has had connection. Should she refuse to tell the name of the man, she may be beaten by her family until she confesses. She may be rejected by her husband if he so desires; in all likelihood, her seducer will be beaten and fined. The gifts given her will be fewer than would otherwise be the case, while, unless the man she had married is deeply in love with her, the obligations which he owes her parents will not be as rigorously fulfilled as they would have been.

Later in the morning the new wife is given her married name.¹ The families of both principals are present, as well as all the friends of the couple. If the bride was a virgin, the man's society also comes. The husband makes a speech in which he gives his reasons for selecting his wife's married name, and, in closing, he announces it. After his speech he asks his society to "push" him—that is, he asks them to contribute money-gifts to help him. Drums and drummers are present and now the bridegroom dances, while his new wife wipes the perspiration from his face with a small handkerchief which she carries for the purpose. The new husband dances a dance of his own choosing, and after he has performed, everyone dances, the festivities and feasting continuing the entire day. If the girl was not a virgin, the ceremony is less elaborately staged, and the bridegroom's society is not called

¹ See above, pp. 149–151.

upon to help him make a display. The chief penalty, indeed, which a woman pays for the loss of her virginity before marriage is expressed rather in the attitude of her husband and his co-wives than in any overt punishment; for example, it is something to be proclaimed during a quarrel, when it is brought up repeatedly to humiliate her, and make her docile.

The religious ceremonials which must be gone through in connection with marriage remain to be discussed. Two days before a girl goes to her husband, her father gives food to the spirit of the founder of the family, the *schwiyó*, after which food is also given to the deified souls of the sib ancestors and to the gods of the pantheon of which the girl is a member. This is done quietly, however, and no drums or dancing accompany the rite. The day on which the marriage is to take place is decided by the diviner, and when he consults Fate, a sacrifice which is thrown away into the bush is given to help make the destiny of the woman a good one. Laghá, the messenger of the gods, as always, "eats" with the other gods, but on the day the girl leaves to go to her husband he "eats" again, this time alone, and on this occasion he is given palm-oil, a cock, and cornmeal. If the girl is a member of a cult-group, then before leaving for the compound of her husband she consults her deity and also Fate, to ascertain whether the shrine she has in her father's house may be transported to that of her husband. If the answer is in the affirmative, this is done; if not, she goes to her old home to worship.¹ All the offerings to the spirit of the founder of the girl's sib must have remained for two days in the house of worship dedicated to that spirit, and these same offerings must also have been left for a time in the shrine of the ancestral spirits of the bridegroom's sib, the purpose of this being to notify the ancestors of the arrival of a new member of the family. The husband, like the wife, sacrifices to his Destiny; indeed, it is he who calls in the diviner to set the date for the marriage.

The second type of Dahomean marriage is known as *asidjosi* ("woman-give-back-woman"). To illustrate the circumstances under which a marriage of this kind takes place, it may be assumed that the original proposal of marriage was made by the girl's father when she was an infant, or that this marriage, proposed when the girl was herself of marriageable age, was not to her liking. In either case, before the

¹ This is according to the version of one informant. All others, however, insisted that a member of a cult group—a *vodúnst*—would never have a private shrine, and hence that the transfer spoken of here could not occur.

consummation of the match, the girl goes to another man. Up to the point when the fiancé of this girl is to take her to his home, he has performed all the duties expected of a son-in-law; he has cared for his future father-in-law's field, for his future mother-in-law's house, he has fulfilled any obligations resulting from a death in the girl's family, and has not only given the preliminary gifts, but has also presented the *xɛngbò*—the seven hundred and twenty cauries, goat, salt, and other objects that put the final supernatural stamp of approval on the marriage. On the day he comes for his bride, however, it is discovered that she has run away. Her family look everywhere for her, but not finding her, the bridegroom and his emissaries return without the promised bride, and after a time the girl is found living with the man of her own choosing.

When this occurs both the girl and her seducer are brought before a council of her sib. The man who has "stolen" her has made no expenditure for her, so that where possible, the father and mother of the girl bring the culprit before a chief. Here he recounts the story of how he has taken the girl, saying that she loves him, has no affection for the candidate proposed by her father, and that she will refuse to accept this other man as her husband. The chief then calls before him the one to whom the girl was promised, and tells him to calculate the amount he has expended for the girl. Everything, including his work, is counted, and when the total has been arrived at, the man who has taken the girl is told to pay this sum to her original fiancé. When this is done the girl then becomes his *akwénɛ̀si*—his "legitimate" wife—and all is as though he had been the one to whom she had been promised originally. In such a case there is little or no ceremonial when the girl goes to her husband's compound to stay. If he desires, he may give the kind of celebration that has been described above, and after the girl has been with him for several months he may give food to his Destiny and to Legbá, the messenger of the gods. But it is not felt that any of the rites preceding marriage need be gone through again, for all the required ceremonies had already been performed by the original fiancé. The *akovi* may bless this marriage at some later time if this is desired, but it is not always done.

This marriage, of "a woman who has been given again," is quite regular, since everything necessary to make her an *akwénɛ̀si* has been done, and it is merely a question of the substitution of men. The case is not as simple as has been presented here, however. The situation that has been described is only one of a number of possible reasons for

a marriage in this category and the outcome only the happiest one of a number of possible terminations. For example, it often happens that the man refuses or is unable to compensate the original fiancé for his expenditure. In such a case, the match moves into the class of "free" marriages. The situation of the girl may become serious, particularly if the marriage arranged for her is one of the semi-diplomatic matings calculated to engender good feelings between two sibs. What far-reaching consequences such a rash adventure may have will be seen when the last marriage-type in the *akwénýsì* category is discussed. At the very least, the girl is severely scolded and more frequently beaten by her relatives, while if the consequences of her elopement are serious enough, she may even be rejected by her family and expelled from sib-membership, the most dreaded penalty that can be inflicted on any Dahomean.

It often comes about that the unsuccessful suitor, deeply resenting the slight put upon him by the girl, has recourse to magic, and many women stated that a large proportion of wives married in this category come to term prematurely without giving birth, or when they bear children, produce sickly offspring who die young. Any discussion of a marriage of this type in its human aspects brings the expression that it is at best dangerous. How this feeling is strengthened can be comprehended by referring to a definite case, the development of which was observed in a Dahomean family. In this case a girl who had been promised to a man of another village was secretly wooed by an attractive young man of her own quarter. The result was an elopement shortly before the time that the marriage which had been arranged was to occur. The amount calculated by the original fiancé was repaid him, and the woman was declared to be the *akwénýsì* of the one with whom she had run away. Their mating was apparently a happy one. The first wife of the husband of this girl had recently given birth to a child and he was therefore not living with her, hence the relationship between him and this second wife was a mating characterized by unusual adjustment, and by a display of affection not often witnessed. Five months after the final payments had been made to the original fiancé, the young woman had a miscarriage, and was ill for some time thereafter, and it was whispered everywhere that the magic employed by the scorned fiancé was responsible.

The next form of marriage, *vibióbiò*, is not an important variant. The difference between it and the *akwénýsì* type consists chiefly in the fact that the match is initiated by a man when he sees a girl who appeals

to him and whom he desires for a wife. In such a case the man calls upon some of the men of the girl's family with whom he is acquainted to discover if the girl has been promised to another. If the answer is negative, the man goes directly to the father of the girl and asks for her. It is characteristic of Dahomean psychology that even though the girl's father is perfectly aware of the fact that the one who desires his daughter has already taken pains to ascertain that she is not promised to anyone else, his reply is that the girl is already betrothed. The man who desires her, however, pleads that the father call his diviner and find out whether or not the match can be made. The father finally acquiesces, and after Destiny has been shown to be favorable to the marriage, he calls the suitor and summons the mother of the girl. He does not say explicitly that he accepts this man as a prospective son-in-law, but merely tells him to take good care of his mother-in-law. Upon this the man begins the process already described of discharging his duties and making the payments necessary for an *akwénṣi* marriage. If the girl has already been promised, however, and the one who desires her for a wife is an acceptable candidate and presses his plea, the father may call the diviner and, giving him the two names, ask which one Fate chooses for the husband of his daughter. The one whose name calls forth an affirmative answer is given the girl. If the new suitor is accepted, and the original fiancé has already made *akwénṣi* payments, then the latter is repaid for everything he has given the girl's family and the match becomes one of the *asidjòsi* type, the second described above.

The fourth form of marriage, *namímanawe*¹—"give us, and we will give you"—is also called *dyonusi*—"wife by exchange." While not prevalent among well-to-do urban people, this type of marriage occurs extensively among the peasants and among poorer folk generally. To illustrate marriage in this category, it may be supposed that a man has an unmarried daughter or a sister—one whom he himself may not marry. He finds that another man also has a marriageable young woman who is unpledged, and he approaches this other with the suggestion that each take the eligible girl of the other's family as a wife. In such a case the two men may give one another such gifts as they please, but neither performs the usual services for the other, since the exchange of women mutually cancels the customary obligations of the fiancé. All the traditionally mandatory gifts that mark the

¹ This marriage-form is mentioned by Le Herissé, p. 223, but briefly, since he felt it was dying out. This would not seem to be the case.

marriage as a "legal" one, as well as all the duties described above toward the Ancestors, Fate, Legbá, and the other deities that the *akwénúsi* marriage demands, are fulfilled by each, however. It is such obligations as that of the son-in-law to send a *dókpwè* each year to till the field of his father-in-law that are disregarded. Should one of these women leave her husband, this man will divorce his sister or daughter from the other in retaliation.

The next category of marriage requires only brief description. It is termed *tochési*—"wife-from-my-father"—or *toche we dānu mi*—"my-father-gives-us." In matches of this type, the father provides all the necessary funds needed by a son to obtain a wife, but he does not give this money as a free gift. The boy must work for his father until he has repaid the amount advanced, and during this time his wife makes her home with the wives of his father.

The last marriage of the *akwénúsi* category presents a complex situation which is ethnologically significant not because it is an everyday occurrence, but because its exposition aids in understanding the extent to which complicating factors are allowed for by the Dahomeans. This form of marriage is termed *adomevɔ́dídà*—"marrying the empty stomach"—and occurs under circumstances such as the following:

A marriage is proposed to a man. He tells this to his best friend, and explains that the expense involved is too heavy for him to bear. His friend offers him aid, which is accepted, but no mention is made of repayment. The friend not only pays the pre-marital expenditures but continues to assist in the support of the girl after she is married. Thus, when her family ask help of their daughter's fiancé, or later, of their son-in-law, he goes to his friend, who gives him whatever is necessary. If there is a funeral, the friend provides the amount that is needed. When the girl has been brought to her husband's compound, her husband's friend provides her with fire-wood and, when he comes from the field, he gives her maize and millet. If she becomes ill, it is this man, not her husband, who cares for her. However, this friend does not live with the woman he is supporting.

If, when the woman becomes pregnant and the husband consults the diviner to foretell whether she will successfully support the ordeal of childbirth, a sacrifice of a goat and chickens is decreed, the friend furnishes the sacrifice. It is understood, of course, that if the child is a daughter, this daughter will be pledged to her father's friend as a wife, so that if events follow the normal course, this daughter, when

of proper age, will be taken by the man who has supported her mother. He will be freed of the customary obligations to his friend, who will become his father-in-law, yet this wife none the less will be regarded as an *akwénýisè*, since in having provided the money and gifts which made possible her mother's marriage under this category, his duties will have been discharged. If, when the woman is delivered, the child is a boy, the friend merely says, "I am not discouraged," and continues to provide for his friend's wife as before. If another male child is born, the friend continues to provide for the mother as before. It may be assumed that finally a girl is born to the woman. In the normal course of events this girl would eventually be married to the friend, already well along in years, and in this way the debt that had accumulated would be discharged.

Let us suppose that this daughter dies before she becomes of a marriageable age, and the woman for whom the friend has cared bears no more children. The two friends had by this time informed their respective heirs of this act of friendship, and the reciprocal obligations it entails, and had instructed them not to let the friendship "fall to the ground." In time, when these two men are both dead, the heir of the recipient of the aid gives a girl of the compound to the son of his father's friend to be his wife. The fiancé supplies the traditional gifts for the marriage, and, when the time comes for her to be sent to him, the fiancé, following the conventional pattern sends his messengers to bring his promised bride to his compound.

We may assume, however, that upon the arrival of the messengers, the girl is found to have eloped with another. Without delay, the man to whom this girl has been promised goes to the head of his sib, and informs him in minutest detail of all that had transpired both between his father and his father's friend, and himself and that friend's son. So grave a breach of faith is this, that the sib-head at once pronounces a divorce between all women of his sib who are married to men of the sib to which the runaway girl belongs. That very night, all the women of the sib, wherever they may be living, whether in Abomey or other parts of Dahomey, who are married to men of this other sib, are sent for. No reason is given them, but they dare not refuse the summons, for the message recalls them in the name of the spirit of the ancestor who founded the sib, the *tshwíyó*.

As has been seen, the membership of a Dahomean sib is large, and because of this action it happens that many men and women who could not know anything of the affair between the two friends of the pre-

ceding generation and between their sons are suddenly separated, men finding their wives divorced from them for no apparent reason. The men whose wives have been withdrawn from them go to the head of their sib to find the reason for what has happened, and, when the cause has been discovered, they bring the mother and father of the offending girl before the sib-head, securely trussed with rope. They also search for the runaway girl, and when they find her, she, too, is bound and brought where her parents are. They ask her for the name of the man with whom she has run away, and should she refuse to answer, they demand the information at once in the name of this most powerful of ancestral spirits, the *chwiyo*, so that she must respond. And when she confesses, the head of her sib pronounces a divorce between all the women of this sib who are married to men belonging to the sib of the individual who has run away with this girl, for she had been promised to the son of the man who had provided a wife for his friend. Once again, then, there is a renewed outcry, this time from the members of the sib of the adulterer against this man who has been the cause of their wives being taken from them. Great pressure is brought on the adulterer by his sib, and unless he is a person of strong will and has great affection for the girl with whom he has eloped, he will consent to give her up. Should he refuse to do so, the men who have lost their wives call a sib council and bring judgment against the culprit. If he is already married, his wives are all taken from him, his fields and everything he owns are confiscated, and if he still refuses to give up the girl, the sib renounces him.

It is not difficult to understand how unsettling an occurrence of this kind must be, not only to the local community, but often to all Dahomey, and the councils that are held between various sib-heads and the efforts of arbitration to induce the sibs who are parties to the quarrel to relent often take many months. It is said that in the time of the kingdom, it was a matter which the King himself would attempt to arbitrate. Yet though he would try to bring the elders of the interested sibs together for consultation, it was emphasized that not even he could command them to compose their difficulties. He might offer his good offices and assert moral suasion, but at such times feelings ran so high that he dared not risk the consequences of arbitrary interference.

Whatever the outcome, the girl who caused the trouble is never given to the man to whom she was originally promised. Her sib call a council, and give her as wife to some man who is not affiliated with any

sib concerned in the matter, that is, who belongs neither to the sib of her former fiancé, nor to that of the man with whom she had eloped. For the injured man—that is, the son of the one who had provided for the wife of his friend—they take the most eligible young girl in the sib, one who has just reached the age for marriage, and give her to him as a wife. She may have been promised to another, but this is not allowed to interfere, for the matter is too serious to allow personal preferences to dictate action. The man, for his part, also has little to say at this juncture, for he must take the girl tendered to him. He notifies the head of his sib of this fact, and the decree of divorce between the members of the two sibs primarily concerned is revoked. Shortly after this, the other wholesale decree is also revoked. If the man and the girl who have offended refuse to part, they become wanderers in Dahomey, suffering the most serious penalty the Dahomean can inflict. They are members of no sib. They take part in no ancestral ceremonies. They inherit neither from father nor mother. Most important of all, there are no ancestral spirits to whom they can look for aid, and their children become as rootless and adrift as they.

Chapter XVII

MARRIAGE (Continued)

The first form of the second group of marriage-types constitutes the Dahomean "free" relationship.¹ It is the seventh in the list of forms which marriage may take, and, as has been indicated, its name, *xadudô*, has the significance of "taking a friend into custody." According to men who discussed marriage, this form is most preferred at the present time, though, as will be seen, women who had passed their prime were not only less certain of the desirability of this kind of mating, but named objections to it. From the point of view of the men, the facts that neither husband nor wife is held by any other ties than those of affection, that neither has contracted any other obligations than those dictated by personal choice, and, above all, that the marriage has resulted from common consent and has not been imposed by outsiders give to the *xadudô* marriage the glamor of romance.

In this type of marriage when a man finds a girl he fancies, he courts her directly, instead of deferring to her father for consent and marriage terms. If she favors him, she comes to his compound from time to time, or secret meetings are arranged whenever possible. The affair is clandestine—no gifts are given either to her father or her mother—and her parents learn of the relationship when they discover that their daughter is with child. The girl is thereupon asked for the name of the father of her unborn child, and, when this is revealed to the family, they summon her lover. He comes, accompanied by his father, or, if his father is dead, by his mother, or, should both his parents be deceased, by an uncle or aunt. He is asked to tell why he had seduced this girl, and, when he has stated his reasons, he appeals to his relatives to pronounce judgment and to vindicate him. Good form dictates that the reply of his relatives to this plea be one of condemnation. If the girl had been promised to another as an *akwén-îsî*

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, (p. 210): "Le *ha-dido*, mot à mot l'union de camarades, est réellement l'union libre. Aucune dot n'est constituée; aucun cadeau n'est remis obligatoirement aux parents de la femme. Les conjoints s'unissent librement, généralement avec le consentement des parents."

serious trouble may ensue, for her family at once begin to complain that their house "has been broken" by this occurrence. When the girl's mother is alive, matters are made easier for the girl, who weeps and implores that she be given in marriage to the man she favors. Under such circumstances, her family calls upon the man to whom she is promised to calculate before the village chief the payments he has made to them, and the seducer is made to repay him this amount. With this payment discharged, the marriage goes over into the *asidjosi* category.

When, however, the young woman refuses to give up her lover, and goes to him in spite of parental objection and chastisement, a "free" *xadudô* marriage actually occurs. In such instances, unpleasantness invariably results, for should the family of the man be on good terms with the relatives of the girl whom he has seduced, or be under obligation to them, he will be tied and severely flogged in an effort to make him give her up. In the event that her family do not wish to give up the prospective son-in-law who as her fiancé commenced the *akwénýsi* regime, he is told that the girl promised him has been made pregnant by another, but that since her family values his friendship, they will give him another daughter. More commonly, unless the family of the girl take active measures, she is left to her seducer. Her children belong to the mother herself, for though they take the sib membership of their father, they are not under his control. Her daughters, as a rule, are not given as *akwénýsi*, the prevailing attitude being that since their mother "rejected" that form of marriage, it should not be imposed on them, but her sons often contract marriages in the *akwénýsi* category.

A man may give *akwénýsi* status to a wife with whom he has entered into a free relationship by giving a young woman under his charge—a daughter or a younger brother's daughter—to the father or brother of this woman. Such a marriage enters the category "Give me and I will give you," one of the *akwénýsi* forms. A *xadudô* wife who is well treated and who retains her affection for her husband may give her children into his care, while, on the other hand, a man who is devoted to a wife married in this way may build a compound for her and her children, and give her a great deal of his wealth before his death, in order to establish her future and that of their children.

The ceremony of name-giving—essentially the marriage-ceremony—for a mating of this type is often more elaborate than that which marks the consummation of marriages in other categories. As in other types of marriages, it is held at the compound of the husband,

the young people gathering there for feasting and dancing, with the members of the husband's and the wife's societies also in attendance. The husband announces to those assembled that this marriage is one of choice, not of compulsion, that he desires this girl and she him, and he then makes her gifts of cloths and bracelets and money. He next addresses his society members, and asks them to "push," whereupon they add their gifts, often giving more for a *xadudó* mating than any other, because young people are enthusiastic about a match made freely by the parties concerned. The members of the societies to which the two belong and their other friends applaud the fact that this couple have had the courage to arrange the marriage themselves. Not infrequently, this acclaim is the public expression of a share in making this mating possible, for the friends of the two are the intermediaries during the courtship, seeing to it that the suspicions of the father and mother of the girl are not awakened, and keeping watch during the meetings of the pair so they may have privacy. Feasting as usual occurs after the giving of gifts, followed by dancing that is participated in by all present. If a man is already married, his other wives attend this celebration.

The next category of marriage is that named *gbòsũ dónó gbòsì*—"giving the goat to the buck."¹ This form occurs but seldom among commoners, but is frequent in upper class families, particularly among royalty, with girls of commoner or slave status figuring most often as the female mates. It is based directly upon the social fact that women of position in many instances became independently wealthy and founded their own compounds. A woman, spoken of by the Dahomean as a "free" woman in the sense of one being economically independent though not necessarily sexually promiscuous, may still engage in wealth-creating enterprises after her own marriage. She may have farms and palm-groves of her own, and if she so desires, she may decide to establish a compound for herself. To do this it is necessary for her to obtain control of children who, when they are grown, will be able to carry on the affairs of the compound and provide for its perpetuation. Such a woman, therefore, "marries" another as *akwénũsì*. This fact does not imply a homosexual relationship, although it is not to be doubted that occasionally homosexual women who have inherited wealth or have prospered economically establish compounds

¹ Cf. Le Herissé (pp. 210-211). In his discussion, however, Le Herissé has confused this marriage-type with the twelfth category described below. It is, furthermore, doubtful whether his assertion is valid that this form of marriage, popular in earlier times, is disappearing with European control.

of their own and utilize their relationship to the women they "marry" to satisfy themselves.¹

In marriages of the type under discussion where the woman of means asks and is given a girl from a family other than her own, she supports all the payments and gifts decreed for this form of marriage in the same manner as though she were a man, since she takes the girl as her *akwénfisi*. She causes a house to be built near her own, and installs the young woman there. She is regarded by the inhabitant of this house as a husband, and is called "husband" by her "wife." From among her male acquaintances, or perhaps from among the men of her husband's family, she chooses a man to whom she "gives" the young woman she has "married." He is told that the girl is his to live with, that he may come to her as often as he likes, but that he may not take her to his own compound. The man, of course, is under no obligations of any sort. He has no payments to make, nor does he have any duties toward the girl's parents, for all these obligations have already been discharged, or are being discharged, by the woman who has given him the girl. All children born of this mating, consequently, belong to the woman who is the nominal husband of the girl, and after her death come under the control of her heirs.

It now becomes clear why this type of marriage is given the name it bears. The native statement is: "When a goat becomes big, one does not ask which buck had caused her to conceive."²

In such a fashion a woman may create a "house" of her own. If she can afford it, she may "marry" several girls and give them to men to breed children for her, so that her compound becomes more and more populous. At the death of its founder, such an estate is usually divided between two heirs, the oldest son and daughter. The man who inherits takes charge of the girls of his mother's compound, while the woman is given control of the boys. These children must intermarry, and, since they are the offspring of mothers and fathers

¹ It is possible that "marriages" of this type are spread much more widely over Africa than has been hitherto suspected. Meek (vol. i, p. 209) mentions a similar form in north-eastern Nigeria, while Stayt (pp. 143-144) describes "marriages" of this kind among the far distant Ba-Venda of Southeastern Africa, and C. G. and B. Z. Seligman (pp. 164-165) note a similar institution in the Nilotic Sudan. The account of this type of marriage given here is substantially that presented in Herskovits (IV).

² The words of Le Herissé in introducing his exposition of this marriage form, puts the matter with great cogency: "On conduit 'une chèvre à un bouc'; qui sera la propriétaire des petits de la chèvre? Sans nul doute, le propriétaire de la chèvre. Il en est ainsi des enfants nés sous ce régime. Ils deviennent la propriété du maître de la mère, ou plus exactement, ils tombent sous la même puissance que leur mère."

of different sibs, this violates no rule of incest. In this way, the male heir, who controls the daughters of the family created by his mother, benefits by the work which must be done for him by his "sons-in-law," though the children of these matches are under the control of the female heir, since it is to her that these men are responsible. After this first generation, the oldest daughter of the oldest daughter takes the name of the founder of the compound and assumes the headship of it. It is to be noted that the description, in an earlier chapter, of the manner in which a compound is divided as it grows, is never followed in the case of a relationship-group headed by a woman, for no matter how large the compound or how many members it may eventually contain, it must always remain a single unit.

Marriages of female descendants of the girls originally "married" by the founder of the compound remain always in the same category. Though a girl may be given to some man in marriage, the control over her children always reverts to the head of her compound. The process begun by the originator of the compound is continued, in later generations, with the female heads "marrying" more girls, giving them to men to mate with, so that more offspring may be reproduced to continue the compound. Not only does this process of each new head of the compound acquiring new "wives" for herself continue, but it is a matter of pride for each new woman who heads the group to introduce a greater number of them into the compound than any predecessor. It should be observed that though the girls are brought into the group as *akwénýsì*, yet because they have been taken as *akwénýsì* of women, their daughters may not be married as *akwénýsì* to a man outside the family.

If the situation arises of a generation in which there are no eligible daughters to inherit, the oldest son of the house is named its head, but he must assume the name of the female founder of the compound. His sons inherit from him. If the compound grows too unwieldy, he may allow the girls under him to live outside the compound, but always claims the children of such matings. If he acquires *akwénýsì* wives with whom he does not himself cohabit, he must give the daughters by such matings to his sons as wives, and since the fathers of the girls under his charge are always brought from outside the group, the male head of such a compound takes as his own wives such of these girls as he desires.

The attitude of the man who is called in to fulfil the function of the "buck" would seem to bear investigation, but when asked whether

a man needs persuasion to take a woman on these terms, the only reaction of the Dahomeans was one of astonishment that such a surmise might be possible. The invariable reply was that the woman who called in a man to mate with a girl was favoring him. From the Dahomean point of view, the arrangement simply means that not only has he another woman with whom he may seek satisfaction, but that she is available to him without any expenditure of money or effort and without any responsibility on his part for her.

The ninth form of marriage is of significance because a woman married in this category does not follow the rule of residence, but lives at her father's compound after her marriage and not in the compound of her husband. It is from this fact that its designation, *vidõtshwě*, "the child stays at her father's home," is derived. Both this form and the preceding one offer commentary on the difficulty of characterizing the social organisation of a given culture in a phrase. Thus the whole feeling of Dahomean society would compel the description of it as patrilineal and patrilocal. The legal form of descent, as we have seen, is in the male line, and to suggest to a Dahomean man that he make his residence with his wife's family, or even that there are peoples where this is done, brings only laughter. Yet it has been seen in the description of the last marriage type and will be evident in the present and succeeding ones, that matrilineal descent may obtain in Dahomey. Similarly, in this form as in others to be described, it will be shown how matrilineal residence, for the children if not the husband, is also found.

A *vidõtshwě* marriage occurs when a compound, depleted in population, is threatened with extinction because of the diminution in the number of possible heirs. In this event, the head of the compound calls a young woman of marriageable age to him and says to her, "Go, choose a husband. There is room here for your house; here you can stay. Tell the man of your choice to come and build your house for you." As will be seen, the matter of choice by the woman is important, for in this instance, as in many other phases of Dahomean life, freedom of choice carries with it a distinct obligation not to renounce the choice thus freely made. Once her mate is selected, the girl comes before the head of her compound and announces her choice. He in turn calls the principal members of the household together, and informs them that this girl is to be married. He presents the man to them, and, since their approval is necessary for the marriage, the one who has been chosen is careful to make the best impression possible. If he is

approved of, the oldest member of the compound makes the following pronouncement: "My child, the *tshwiyô* approves your choice. From this day, we shall consider this man a member of our family. You yourself have chosen your husband. You must not come back some day to tell us that this man no longer pleases you. We bless you in the name of all our ancestors." He then admonishes the man who has been chosen to build additional houses for his wife, and to come frequently to her house so that there may be many children for his new family.

Such a man is regarded as a child of the household, even though he never makes his permanent residence there, but only comes from time to time to stay a few days with his wife. The man supports all the expenses of the marriage, but it is formally forbidden for him to give the seven hundred and twenty cauries and the goat for the spirit of the ancestral founder of the family, since this would bring spiritual sanction from the ancestral founder for the children to belong to the father's sib. Similarly, though he works for his father-in-law, owing him the same obligations as in the *akwénîsî* marriage, the 5.50 francs and the raffia sack filled with salt, in addition to the two things mentioned above, must not be passed between the bridegroom and his new wife's family. When children are born to the pair, they are divided between the family of their mother and the family of the father. The division, however, is never an equal one. Thus, if a woman married under this category bears five children, three remain in the maternal family and two come under the control of their father. If there are four, the family of the wife take three, that of the husband one; if six, the maternal family take four, the paternal, two. The maternal family is thus always favored in the apportioning of the children; furthermore, the head of the mother's compound has the choice of the children who are to remain with him. If the man chosen has other wives whom he has married as *akwénîsî*, one of the children born of the *akwénîsî* category of mating succeeds to the headship of the father's estate. In all other respects, however, the children of the *vidôtschwé* who have been turned over to their father as his share of the offspring of this marriage possess full rights of inheritance, equally with the children of other wives of this man married in *akwénîsî* categories. But when the husband dies, a *vidôtschwé* wife is free, and is not herself inherited by his heir. In the event of divorce or death the children are divided. If all the offspring of a *vidôtschwé* mating are boys, those retained by the mother's family work with the

grandfather; if girls, those who are retained by their mother's family must remain in the grandfather's compound and marry in the same manner as their mother. They may never marry as *akwénýsì*, because "at the beginning this was refused." However, the sons may and often do acquire *akwénýsì* wives, and a son by such a marriage may inherit the estate of his father. A daughter of a *vidõtshwě* sent to her father may herself be married as an *akwénýsì*, if her father desires. Here the point of division of marriage types into those where the father controls the children and those in which the mother controls them comes out most clearly, since the daughter of a *vidõtshwě* sent to her father is free from the restriction that prevents her sisters, who have remained under the control of the mother, from marrying as *akwénýsì*.

The next type, *vidòkpokátá*—"putting the child over the father's threshold"—is in all respects, except the logic which dictates such a marriage, the same as the preceding form. Under this category, only one daughter is chosen to remain at home, and the arrangements for the marriage are made by the mother of the girl. The difference between this form and the one discussed above lies in the fact that the headship of a household founded by a woman must go to a woman, and through her eldest daughter and the eldest daughter of this daughter, must remain in the female line, in order that the name of the female of the first generation who began the arrangement may be perpetuated. The mating of cousins is common under this form, otherwise the *vidòkpokátá* marriage does not differ from the preceding form discussed.

The type of marriage called *chiosì* is one under which a man inherits a wife at the death of his father or uncle or older brother.¹ Though from the point of view of the man it constitutes a new marriage, as far as the woman is concerned, it is merely a perpetuation of the *status quo*. There is no ceremony attached to such a mating, but if a man inherits a woman from an uncle, he gives a special offering to the soul of this uncle when he gives food to the spirits of his ancestors. The women who are inherited retain the same status that they had with their former husbands as far as marriage categories are concerned.

¹ Bosman may be quoted here to show how long, historically, the inheritance of wives has been practised; he says (p. 322), "Upon the Father's Death, the eldest Son inherits not only all his Goods and Cattle, but his Wives, except his own Mother, for whom he provides a separate Apartment and sufficient Subsistence, in case she cannot live without it. This Custom obtains not only with the King and Captains, but also among the Commonalty."

Mention has already been made of the manner in which the widows of a man are divided, but it is well to recapitulate here for the sake of clarity, by taking as an example a man who at his death had four old wives and six young ones. The old will be divided first and the young afterwards, and, unless the dead man had specifically designated that a given wife go to a particular son, the head of the sib does the dividing. He will have consulted Fate as to which woman is to be given to which man, but this consultation is secret and is made of his own volition. At the family council where the division is publicly made, his decisions appear arbitrary. Though in the apportioning a young man, inheriting a wife of his father or uncle, is given a woman much older than himself, he must have sex relationship with her when her turn comes to live with him, until she attains the menopause. No man would dare be remiss in this, for it is believed that if an inherited wife is sexually neglected, the offender will be punished by the ancestors with death. None of these considerations apply in the case of a man who inherits his own mother, for, as has been pointed out, she is not regarded as his wife, but merely comes to live out an honored old age with him.

The twelfth Dahomean marriage form is associated with the practices of the royal family, and is seldom, if ever, found at present. It derived its name, *avonúsi*, "woman-with-cloth," from the fact that such a marriage was the result of a command given a man by a princess to take for his wife some girl who had been confided to her by her father, the King, in which case his only obligation was to provide a cloth for his wife.¹ Girls whom princesses "controlled" were not slaves, but were young women from the countryside who had been sent to the palace of the King to act as attendants upon the princesses. Such obligations as a man chosen to be the husband of such a girl assumed were to the princess who had given him his wife. Moreover, the children born of the match were not under the control of either their father or mother but of the princess, who would later have the right to give these children in marriage, to dictate their place of residence—in short, who had all the rights that in ordinary life are held over his children by a Dahomean man. However, the men selected for these matches usually lived at some distance from Abomey, and hence the princess seldom exercised her prerogative of control. The marriage-name usually given at marriage to a wife by her husband was, in this

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, p. 210. The marriage-type he calls *gandoba*, and describes on pp. 223-224 of his book, may be a variant of this form.

case, conferred by the princess. Marriages of this kind were considered advantageous to both the mates. It was thought to be an honor for a man to be selected for a marriage of this sort, for with the girl usually went substantial gifts. As for the wife, she was not only under the protection of the princess, but, being thus free of restraints imposed by her husband, might leave him whenever she wished, by merely obtaining the consent of her patroness. If the wife took a fancy to another man, it was not difficult to obtain the acquiescence of the princess to the new marriage, especially since a man thus summoned was expected to do a piece of work for the princess who called him.¹

The final type of marriage, *axovivi* ("prince-child-child"), is that of the princesses themselves,² and like everything touching Dahomean royalty, involved much ceremonial. While it may seem curious that the French-speaking Dahomean should use the term "illegitimate" in describing the marriage of the women who held the highest position in the kingdom, it may again be remarked that this word-symbol does not carry its European value, but merely holds the connotation of a mating in which the husband does not have control over his children. This, as will be seen, is explicitly stated during both the ceremony of betrothal and of marriage. This form of marriage is still practised, though where the word "King" is used in the following description, the phrase "head of the royal family" must be substituted to conform to present-day conditions.

When a member of the royal family, who has a marriageable daughter, finds a man he considers a desirable husband for her, he goes to the head of the royal sib and tells him of this man. In pre-conquest days, the King personally arranged the giving away of the daughters of the royal family without any advice from his brothers. This tradition holds at the present time, so that when the head of the royal family is advised of the candidate, he fixes a date some ten days later for a ceremonial when presumably, of his own choice, he will carry out the suggestion made by his relative. At the appointed time a small betrothal celebration is held. The girl is brought dressed in her fineries. Under a shelter and protected from the spectators by the barrier of denuded palm-branches laid end to end along the ground

¹ All accounts of this form of marriage are not equally definite in pronouncing it as distinctly desirable either for the man or woman. A princess who was capricious, or cruel, or jealous, could at any time recall a woman from a man she had learned to love, and give her to another.

² Le Herissé, pp. 217-222, gives a somewhat abbreviated account of a marriage of a princess.

so as to form a rectangular space over which no man except the King, in the olden days, or the chief today, dares to step, the head of the royal family is seated. He takes a small glass and into it pours liquor, giving the glass to the girl and telling her she is to hand it to a man to be designated to her from the group assembled to watch the proceedings. The man chosen is unaware that he is to become the husband of a princess, though arrangements are made that he should be present at the spectacle. Similarly, the princess is not told the name of the man to whom she is to be promised.

The princess, then, when given the glass of liquor, places it on her outstretched right hand, covering it with the palm of her left. Walking slowly and carefully, with her eyes on the ground, she proceeds until she reaches the palm-rib "guard" that separates the head of the royal family and his wives and children from the spectators. As she leaves the side of the sib-head, he speaks the name of the man in a soft voice and, when the princess reaches the "bamboos," she whispers this name in the ear of an old princess who is awaiting her. This woman calls the name of the man loudly, and the cry is echoed by all present. Caught by surprise, the nominee comes forward and kneels on the other side of the bamboos, face to face with the princess he has been called upon to take as a wife. He holds himself in the same manner as she, head and eyes downcast, and all shout "Raise your head! Raise your head!" The princess, then, coming nearer to the man, holds up the glass that he may drink. This done, she returns to the side of the head of her family.¹ Now all the relatives of the man join him and together they prostrate themselves, throwing dust on their faces, chests and backs, while the chosen suitor throws water on the ground and humbles himself further by rolling in this wet earth. The following day, the man presents himself at the palace of the King with his family and his wives, if he has any, and all roll in the dust once more. When he returns to his home, the Meú, the minister under whose surveillance are the princes and princesses—an office which at the

¹ Forbes (vol. ii, pp. 129–130), gives a description of this ceremony which offers an excellent control of the validity of the present account: "The courtiers, sycophants, and fools were now offered an ample opportunity of exercising their disgusting eulogiums on the munificence of their master, as the mae-hae-pah, with cunning mystery, led two coy maidens, each the bearer of a glass of rum, to the centre of the neutral ground, and called Hae-che-lee and Ak-koo-too, two cabooceers, to the presence. Advancing with simple looks they prostrated themselves, and each received and drank a glass of rum, and thus performed the only marriage ceremony known in Dahomey. In this way the monarch honours his favorite officers with ladies of the royal household to wife."

present time is unofficially perpetuated in Abomey—sends a messenger to instruct him to make a house in his compound for his wife. The ceremony of summoning a man to his betrothal to a princess is called *nayanunu*—"princess-drink-drink"—and that where he grovels in the dust is called *kédidè*—"earth-throw-everywhere."¹ After these rites are concluded, the princess is called by the name of her betrothed with the word for wife suffixed to it; thus, if the man's name is *Ayasogbwè*, she is called *Ayasogbwesi*.

Several weeks later the man sends to the palace a calabash containing bottles of various alcoholic beverages, his principal wife acting as bearer if he is married; or if not married, he gives it to a sister or a daughter of his father's brother, or some other woman of his family. This is taken to the *Meúnô*, the "mother of the *Meú*," actually the woman in whose care are the princesses. In a ceremony called *ayq-gbqdudô*, "drink-burden-load," the head of the royal family pours this liquor before the tombs of the dead kings, thus apprising the ancestral spirits of the marriage, and asking them to prosper it. Six months, a year, or even two years may elapse before the preparations for marriage are completed and the suitor comes to tell the *Meú* that he is ready to take his wife. He sends to the palace a basket called *kôblibli*, "earth-roll-over," in which are twenty or thirty or forty small cloths, and large figured cloths, with perfume, beads, ear-rings, mirrors, and other trinkets for his bride. If married, his first wife takes this; if not, his sister or some other female relative.

After another interval of two or three months, on the morning of the day set for the marriage, the bridegroom sends a large container filled with silk, velvet and printed cloths, some perfumes and beads, and, in addition, one large man's cloth and one large woman's cloth. That evening, an hour or two after sundown, the suitor comes before the palace accompanied by drummers. The calabash drum called *gboyáyá* is mandatory, but if he wishes he may have more, and in all probability will bring a large number of drums of all kinds. With him come the members of his family, of his society, and other friends. He brings as many people as he can gather, that he may appear a man of consequence, and they sing and dance before the palace. The suitor and his retinue are made to wait a long time—often it is a

¹ Cf. Skertchly, (p. 143) who says, "Then follows the dirt-bath, or *ko-dide*, a series of shovelling of earth over the head, making as much display as possible of the smallest amount of sand. When receiving or asking any particular favor, the saluter completely smothers himself with the red earth; rubbing it well into the arms and neck until it sticks to the perspiring skin like dough."

matter of three or four hours before any notice is taken of the arrival of this group of singing and dancing people. Thus, if the suitor and his relatives and friends arrived at eight o'clock, it would be midnight and after before the proceedings would continue, with the Meúnô coming out of the palace by the entrance called *hwepâli* which is reserved for women.

With the Meúnô comes the princess, dressed in white. If the princess has stated that she is a virgin, she wears on her head a white cloth arranged into a tall head-dress. This is done only for princesses, and it is believed that if they have had sexual relations—something which, in their case, is not regarded as too reprehensible—without confessing it, the head-dress will not remain erect. The princess walks behind the Meúnô, who calls the name of the man, a cry taken up by all present. Characteristically, he is some distance away, and the cries must resound for some minutes before he presents himself. When he arrives, the Meúnô first asks him for a bottle of liquor and a calabash of water. These he causes to be brought; the bottle is opened and sixteen drops of its contents are allowed to fall on the ground, after which sixteen drops of the water from the calabash are made to fall in the places where the drops of liquor had fallen. The princess offers her husband some of the drink at arm's length, and he in turn takes the bottle and gives some to her; and this is repeated with the water. To the left of the pair are the gifts of the King (today the head of the royal family), which the Meúnô displays, object by object, that all may see and admire. In addition to cloths and trinkets, it must contain a long necklace of the type worn by princesses called *marwâ-luhwè*, and another of large coral beads called *kaxodénu*. There also must be a large stool. The Meúnô counts the cloths, and publicly announces their number. She calls the name of the princess and presents her with these in behalf of the King. During the monarchy, it was at this point that the King gave into the care of the princess a number of young girl attendants whose marriage-form has been discussed. Even today, the head of the royal family tries to find two or three such young girls to give a princess at her marriage, over whom she will have the right of disposal, though it is becoming increasingly difficult to do this, since under French rule it requires their consent as well as that of their parents to bring them under the control of the head of the royal family.¹ At this time, the princess publicly gives

¹ In outlying rural districts where no knowledge of the French language or of French custom exists, it is still possible to procure them, however.

these girls the names by which they are to be known thereafter—names articulating her gratitude for the “royal” favors.

A second coffer, the one sent by the suitor that morning, is now brought forward. Once more everything is taken out, displayed and counted, and public announcement is made of the number and type of the objects it contains. The large man’s cloth is given to the Meú, who represents the King—today he represents the head of the royal family—while the woman’s cloth is presented to the Meúnq, who acts as representative of the girl’s mother. This display completed, all the other containers and all the objects not in containers are brought forward. One of these coffers holds large women’s cloths, another is filled with small cloths worn by women; and a basket is filled with bracelets. All the objects are again publicly counted, and these are proclaimed as the wealth a princess brings her husband. The dishes which the princess will use—utensils for her kitchen, her broom, her stools, her mats, and two mosquito nets, one for her and one for her husband—are next displayed. Many of these are ornamented with silver and brass, or even gold, and the Meúnq turns to the bridegroom, saying,

“Look you, here is what a princess brings! It is not you who enrich her family, but she who brings wealth to you!”

The King also makes him a present of a substantial sum—perhaps of several hundred francs in today’s values—to help him defray the expenses of the marriage ceremony. Before closing the gift-giving ritual, the Meúnq announces that the princess is to have her own servants and laborers in order that the man “need not so occupy himself with the demands of his royal wife, that he must allow his other wives to want.”

Now the Meúnq, taking the hand of the princess, calls the name of her betrothed. Once more he approaches, and she places the hands of the girl between his and says,

“In the name of the King, I give you this woman who is a daughter of the royal family. Do not abuse her honor. She is of a rank whose members may not be struck on the cheek. Do not insult her father, for if you do, you insult the King. Do not insult her mother, for if you do, you insult a queen. No demands were made upon you when this girl was promised you, and no demands are made of you now that she is coming to live with you. You did not give the gifts that are customarily required of husbands. You did not perform the

xóṅgbò.¹ You did not even ask that she be given you. All this the King has kept for you as a surprise.

"Wherefore, know that you have no rights over this girl. She is your wife and you are her husband, but the children born of your mating will be members of the royal family. Yours is not the right to ask of a diviner the name of the ancestral soul from which the soul of any of your children derives, for their souls will come from the souls of the royal ancestors. We shall supply you with the special magic for making women faithful, so that if your wives betray you, it will be their death. Yours is not the right, however, to give this magic to the girl you are now marrying; if you do this, it will be your own death. You must not take her to your *tshwiyó* to tell him you have made this marriage, for your *tshwiyó* has no rights over this girl, who is the daughter of Agasú.² It is forbidden to any of the other women of your family to insult this girl. The princess, on her part, is not to annoy her co-wives."

When the Meúnò has pronounced these words she turns to the princess and says,

"In behalf of your father, I give you today into the hands of this man, who has been chosen as a husband for you. Respect him more than do any of his other wives, for yours is the task, as a member of a great family, to set them a good example. Let this man see, from the work you do for him, that verily your great father commands. Tənsu³ tells you not to eat the flesh of the panther or of the spotted deer. He tells you as well that when you are no longer satisfied with this man, you may leave him, but only for reasonable cause. Do not take advantage of your *sú*,⁴ however, to break the house of this poor man."

Once again the Meúnò turns to the man and says,

"Here is your wife, your true wife. She is not a beam to be transported by two men. She is a 'load' you must prove able to carry yourself and not allow another to carry for you. If you fail in this, remember what we have told you, and do not say later we have been evil in our dealings with you."

Now the Meú addresses him, declaiming loudly: "The King has done you a great honor. Give your wife a name, to show your gratitude." All kneel, while the husband appears to be lost in deep thought, and after a sufficient pause, simulating spontaneity, he calls out the name he has come prepared to give her. When he pronounces this

¹ The ceremony of giving the sack of salt and cauries, etc. which validates marriages of the *akwénqsi* type, has been described above, p. 306.

² Agasú is the royal *tshwiyó*.

³ A deity whose special function is to guard women.

⁴ See above, pp. 160-162.

name, all repeat it, calling her. The Meúnò gives the command, "Arise," and all rise.

The husband's relatives now are ready to conduct the princess to her new home. She is accompanied by three elderly princesses, who remain with her. When the procession arrives at the door of the palace, a bottle of drink and a calabash of water are given them.

At the home of the husband there is feasting and dancing, and food is especially given to the old women of the royal family who have brought the new wife. Three or four days must elapse before husband and wife may cohabit, and a ceremony termed *xwésáyǎ* ("pig-palace") must be performed before this is permitted them. For this ceremony, the husband slaughters a pig and sends the food to the palace, as an offering to be placed at the shrine to the royal ancestors. Several days later the princess goes to market, and there buys food, which she carries to her new home and prepares for her husband. That night he remains with her. After this first night of intercourse, the husband calls all his friends, his family, his society, and great festivities are held. He gives gifts to his new wife and his friends "push" him, and on this day he sends the old women who came with the girl back to their home in the palace, giving to each one mat and one cloth, and also sending a mat for the Meúnò. This is called *alòkpasi* ("put-give-wife"). If he has found her a virgin, the old women are further entrusted with the mat on which the marriage has been first consummated, and they take this to the Meúnò. As commentary on the manner in which all rules are waived in the case of royalty, should he find his wife not a virgin, he must remain descreetly silent. If he announced the fact, the girl would leave him at once, and on some pretext or other, cause would be found before long to imprison the man who denounced his royal wife. If it should happen that between the time of her betrothal and her marriage, the princess has sexual relations and becomes pregnant, she is given no gifts on the occasion of her marriage. However, in such a case the King (or head of the royal family) sends for her a few months later, tells her to leave her husband, quietly gives her to another man, and at this time she is presented with all the customary gifts.

The children of a marriage of this kind are called *axoví nyɔnuvi*, ("prince-child woman-child"). They are regarded as princes and princesses; but one in this category may never become the head of the royal family, which is to say that in pre-conquest times such a child could never become King. A daughter of a princess married in

this way may never be married as an *akwénísi*, though her sons may take wives in any category. In the days of the monarchy, this form of marriage was proposed only by the King himself, and the father of the girl had nothing to say. It was a method used to reward those who had been faithful in serving the King, and often a common soldier who had distinguished himself would be chosen for such a marriage. If poor, he was provided with funds to sustain the expenses of this marriage, was given slaves and, in all probability, was himself named a chief.¹

Even when a princess continued on good terms with her husband for the rest of her life, she rarely lived in his compound for more than a few years after her marriage. After this time a compound was erected for her in the royal quarter, and there she saw her husband from time to time. If she did not remain on good terms with him, she simply left him and saw him no more. If she remained with him until her death, the head of the royal clan made a compound apart, where her children lived, and it is here that she was buried. This compound then came under the class of those that have been founded and are ruled by women and is therefore never divided. Her children by this husband did not inherit the goods of their father, though if the personal relations between the parents were friendly, they might be given presents by him; and they participated in the funeral ceremonies at his death.

¹ Skertchly, pp. 439-440, gives a description of a newly-married princess in these terms: "The following morning I went to see the Benazon, whose residence adjoined the Jegbeh palace. We passed through several courtyards, calling out Ahgo in case any of the Amazons were about, and waited for the State treasurer in his fetiche house. This officer has just married a princess, and he wished to introduce us to his new bride. After drinking healths we were conducted through two courts to the private apartments, where we found the new wife got up in splendid style. She was apparently about eighteen years of age, by no means bad looking, and profusely decorated with jewellery. Coral and silver necklaces and bracelets covered her neck and arms, and round her head she wore a fillet of black velvet, from which a number of silver and gold coins depended, after the fashion of the Fellah girls in Egypt. She said that she was pleased to see her father's friend, and presented me with provisions cooked by herself, according to custom, an honour I returned by giving her my hair-brush and a looking-glass set in the back, and a comb sliding behind it."

Chapter XVIII

ADJUSTMENT AND MALADJUSTMENT IN MARRIAGE

When the varieties of Dahomean marriage forms are considered, many questions suggest themselves. What are the attitudes of men and women toward these forms? Are some more highly esteemed than others? Can it be said that some of these are reluctantly entered into? What of the human situations of stress and adjustment which must arise from the exigencies of life within the confines of a compound where a man and his wives reside? What is the attitude of wives married according to one category of marriage toward those acquired under other categories? What are the conflicts that arise when a number of women compete for the attentions of a single man? How are these attempts of a wife to obtain a husband's regard for herself or for her children met by her co-wives; what is the reaction to these efforts of the man himself? There are, in addition, those problems that result from a lack of adjustment between husband and wife as individuals. What is the nature of the provisions for divorce? Is there a single procedure in which divorce can be achieved, or do the various forms of marriage demand as many different procedures? Finally, where adjustment has been achieved, what are the rôles of husband and wife, as they mature, in the community?

There is far from unqualified agreement as to the greater desirability of any type of marriage. Thus it is said, for example: "When a woman is married as an *akwénýsì*, only her parents are satisfied." That this is a general attitude would seem to be implicit in the ritual which validates the *vidõtchwe* union, to cite another form, for when the bride brings her groom before her family, she is asked three times whether she is certain that this is the man she desires as a husband, and three times she must answer affirmatively. In evaluating the *akwénýsì* marriages, the men see those of its aspects which assure to themselves offspring to perpetuate their names, and to their sibs numerical strength for this and ensuing generations. Once the obligations to the parents of the *akwénýsì* have been discharged, and she is fed and housed, her husband exercises his right to make her docile. "But, of course a man beats a wife if she disobeys"—said one man,

adding, however, "If *akwénýsì* wives are faithful and not shiftless, they are treated in no other wise than other wives. It all depends upon the woman and the man, and how much each cares for the other, and for peace." And another added, "It depends, too, upon the status of her father's family." One point was made, however, to indicate an attitude variously interpreted as commiseration and disdain, and this is that an *akwénýsì* is buried not within the compound of her husband, but just outside its walls, for she is no true daughter of the family, her own sib-membership being derived from her father.

Men on their part, however, generally speak of the *xadudó* type of marriage with great enthusiasm, in contrast to their attitude toward *akwénýsì* matings, for which, even at best, they hold a matter-of-fact acceptance. One point brought forward in speaking of a man's relations with a wife married in the *xadudó* category was that such a woman is more loyal and forbearing toward her husband than wives wed under other marriage forms. Thus, if in a quarrel a man insults the parents of an *akwénýsì*, she at once reports to them what has been said, with the frequent result that they keep her with them until the husband has apologized to them; or, if the insult has been a grave one, they refuse to allow her to return to him. A *xadudó*, however, having brought no benefit to her father and family through her alliance, would never go to her father with such tales, and the view is: "Even if you beat them, they stay with you." An obviously idealized version of a man's relation with his *xadudó* may here be quoted to illustrate the attitudes of disinterestedness and devotion associated with a *xadudó* wife. "Among a man's wives it is the *xadudó* whom he can fully trust, and to whom he can confide his secrets. She has come to him because she wished to do so, and has only too often defied her family because of her affection for him. The other wives have children who will inherit his property, and each of them is continually scheming to get the greatest share for her own children. This is never true of the *xadudó*, whose children cannot inherit from their father." That a man might marry several women as *xadudó* and that it would be difficult for him to stand in such a relationship to all of them simultaneously, did not disturb the man who gave this account. Any man with a number of wives knows he must have favorites, and the Dahomean takes for granted the fact of jealousies among his spouses.¹

¹ This despite Le Herissé's statement (p. 225): "La bonne intelligence règne généralement dans ces ménages à plusieurs; le mari traite toutes ses épouses de la même façon, de sorte que la jalousie ne pénètre que rarement dans le coeur des femmes au Dahomey."

More than this, these individual dislikes among co-wives are extended in a large household to group jealousies, so that when two wives quarrel, each is upheld and assisted in verbal recrimination by the wives married under the same category as herself. The position of the husband was tersely summarized by one of large experience: "A man must be something of a flatterer to be master in his own household."

As may be expected after observing the logic that dictates the men's enthusiastic endorsement of the *xadudô* form, it is found that women do not grant overwhelming advantages for themselves in free marriages. According to most of the women, in fact, a *xadudô* marriage offers no worldly advantages, since a wife of this kind has no assured protection against want and ill-treatment from her husband, and no right either to moral or actual support from her own family. Should her husband, moreover, decline the responsibility of providing for her children, it is incumbent upon her to assume this burden as well. In a quarrel, she has the backing neither of her own family nor that of the man. To such wives, say the women, a husband gives nothing but slight gifts, while her parents receive nothing at all. "We say here that men are avaricious and prefer to give nothing. That is why they like to take wives who come to them as *xadudô*, for this costs them nothing." But does the man not make up for these duties by presents which he would be expected to give a woman who commands affection? "What does he give? Two francs, five francs; a cloth, sometimes, when his wife is young and desirable. In a few years he gives nothing, and she has to find food for herself and her children." To be sure, if a woman belongs to a family of position, and has not too daringly flaunted the will of her father, she may be helped by her relatives. If her mother is living, it is not likely that she will know actual want. Even if her mother is dead, she may be given assistance if she is in great need, but this is less because of emotional sympathy for her plight than because of the necessity of maintaining the prestige of the family. Similarly, there are many *xadudô* wives who are in good health and prove to be able traders, and who can thus support themselves by means of their own earnings whatever may come, or are aided by the earnings of their children. Yet because of the fact that the aging *xadudô* is frequently in want, or at the mercy of family charity if her own children are not able to care for her, this form of marriage suffers to some degree a loss of prestige. Moreover, since such a match is invariably contracted against the wishes and interests of at least the

older generation of the woman's family, it has more or less of an unconventional standing.

In this *xadudô* category are found those women who, having begun a relationship because of a romantic attachment, are hardened by their experience, and those also who are emotionally incapable of caring for any man, so that they discard one mate after another. A woman of either type sees to it that a man who enjoys her favors makes her substantial gifts. It was further stated—by women, to be sure—that the Abomey women, unlike those of Whydah (who are held to be more sophisticated), are too prone to give themselves to men who are physically attractive, even supporting them willingly, and thus casting away prudent thoughts of the future.

The security of the position of the *akwénýsi* is contrasted with this in the minds of women. Such a wife is always provided with food and a house, while what she earns is hers to do with as she chooses, since the necessities of life are supplied her. She may not only keep what she gains from the sale of the produce of a field she herself has cultivated, but, if she has worked her husband's field well, he may give her permission, as he often does, to retain a portion of the returns from the sale of the crop. She can therefore accumulate savings for herself, and, when she wishes, may even aid her husband in times of heavy expenditure by making him gifts. If her own family has substantial means, she may receive timely presents from her relatives, and may inherit her mother's property. She is respected, and her children are the heirs of her husband. Moreover, if a wife married as *akwénýsi* is barren, her husband may not send her away and ask for another daughter, for this is absolutely forbidden by the ancestors. If he wishes children and has no other wives, he will marry another *akwénýsi* if he can afford it, and only if he is poor will he take a woman as *xadudô*. It was even said by some women that the woman who marries in the character of *xadudô* is never held in respect, that she is invariably poor and can command nothing, while her children have no position in the community, since it is only in the event that a man has no other heirs, that the children of a *xadudô* may inherit his property.

The *vidôthwè* form is declared desirable by both men and women. As was stated by the men, this is not only because in this marriage the wife chooses her husband and retains the right to send him away at will, but also because she has the support and protection of her family for herself and her children. As for the woman who has been "married"

by another woman, the head of a compound, it was indicated that she forfeits nothing of respect or favorableness of position. Whatever social esteem her father enjoys she shares, and women again agree with men in saying that a father would not hesitate to give a daughter to one who desired to place her in this relationship, even though the man with whom she mates plays only the rôle of the breeder of her offspring. It is clear that tradition has here reduced the physical relationship to biological processes, with the emotional tone deriving from social and economic values rather than from affection or even from mutual pleasure.

The attitudes of men and women toward the various forms of marriage, however candidly spoken, revealed only generalized opinion, and it was not until the ramifications of divorce were being discussed and analyzed that the position of some *akwénúsi* wives became apparent. Marriages in this category, indeed, are considered by certain domineering men, if not by women, as something not far removed from ownership. One Dahomean went so far as to assert that there are aspects of this form of marriage that are indistinguishable from the rights over a slave, though this is obviously the view of one who takes an extreme position in the matter. A more moderate comment summarizes the consensus of opinion: "You pay for your wife and she is given to you. She does nothing without your permission. The seven hundred and twenty cauries you give for her was a considerable sum in the old days, and the gifts you give her parents amount to a great deal more. You could, for instance, buy many goats and sheep with that sum of money." Others quoted the proverb, "Sweat is dear to the body," to make the point that a man's wealth is gained by the sweat of his brow, and that, therefore, anything for which he gives his wealth is his to do with as he wishes.

The two final forms of marriage that were described, *avmúsi* and *axovivi*, are those which arise from the special privileges accorded members of the royal family. Cousin marriage, and even half-brother-sister mating, is a common occurrence among royalty. Indeed, so ephemeral are the sex contacts of princes and princesses, that one can scarcely speak of marriage at all when female members of the royal sib are under discussion. The types of marriage held binding in the case of royalty are those of a prince, or in the olden days, was that of the King with a woman of non-noble blood. The right of royalty to preempt any young woman who might appeal to the King or to a prince was recognized and the wishes of the girl or her family in this,

as in all matters touching royalty, were quite disregarded. Today this would hold for the powerful chiefs of royal blood, though not as flagrantly, to be sure, nor as frequently. It may be added that the fact that a woman who caught the eye of a prince or the King might already have been married did not alter the situation.

The present attitude of women toward marriage with chiefs is unequivocal. A chief today as in the olden days has little difficulty in obtaining wives, and many daughters of prominent men are offered to important chiefs because the prestige of close association with these persons of rank is desired by the fathers of these girls. Women who discussed this matter were, however, unanimous in their feeling that such a marriage is distinctly undesirable. For one thing, a large part of the interests of women are centered about the contacts of the market-place—the enjoyment of bargaining incidental to trade, of gossiping, and more important, of acquiring what profits they earn to spend at their own pleasure. The wife of a chief, however, is not even permitted to appear in the market-place, much less to engage in trade. Indeed, once having entered the compound of the chief, she rarely leaves it, and is never allowed to go outside its walls unaccompanied. She is regarded, furthermore, as being completely at the mercy of her husband, in addition to which she must contend for his affection and favors with too many other wives. Finally, it is whispered that the ease with which a man of power obtains new, young and attractive wives does not help make the life of a woman happier after she has been in the chief's compound for many years, when, after having borne him several children, she has lost her youthful attractiveness.

The "incestuous" marriages of the royal family—that is to say, the privileges of endogamy enjoyed by members of the Leopard-sib—are viewed by commoners as a prerogative denied to all other mortals but those who, like the gods, are not circumscribed in their mode of conduct by ancestral codes set up for the populace at large. Those who participate in this privilege, however, look upon it as less glamorous a right, and their reasons for this are several. First of all, no child born of an endogamous union may become the heir of his father, since the principle of succession involves the fusion of royal and non-royal blood in the offspring chosen. Thus the children of these matings may never attain high position. Again, when unfortunate events or improvident conduct create the need for friendly help, these children have but "one path to walk in"—one family, not two, to whom they can turn for aid. Inasmuch as where both assistance and

indulgence are required, an individual finds these more frequently in his mother's than in his father's family, this is not a negligible handicap for those both of whose parents belong to the same relationship group. Still further, repeated recklessness of princes was punished in pre-conquest days by the Meú, those of princesses by the Meúndò, so that the immunities were not as general as was commonly believed. Parallel agencies still exist today for the exercise of such discipline.

As has been seen, marriages are proposed by the father in most cases, but it is also a truism that, if not the consent of the girl, at least her passive acceptance is necessary to bring the match to a successful conclusion. Thus, for example, if a girl does not desire marriage with a man of her father's choice, she may choose another man and allow herself to be made pregnant by him. Her father must then call the one to whom she is promised, and tell him what has occurred. If the father is determined that his daughter marry the man of his choice, and the man is willing to go on with the match, then perhaps this man will resume the duties of a son-in-law. The girl may, however, go to still another man who, should she fancy him more than the fiancé chosen for her, may induce her father to have the original match annulled by repaying the fiancé what he had expended. In such a case, should the father not wish to break with the man he originally chose to become her husband, his only recourse will be to give him another daughter, since the waywardness shown by the first daughter proffered had effectually prevented the marriage. As in any polygynous society, the more powerful and wealthy a man, the more wives he will have, and therefore the objections a young girl may have to marrying an elderly husband constitute a spur to disobedience to parental wishes and contribute to the number of cases where girls enter into "free"—*xadwíð*—marriages, or where the man chosen to be a husband replaces the other by repaying the amount expended in marriage duties, and taking the girl as *asidjòsi*.

It may be well, at this point, to summarize Dahomean marriage in terms of the individuals involved. In a compound live a man and his wives, his younger brothers and their wives, his grown sons and their wives, and the children of all these women. A man may have contracted marriages in several categories, hence in addition to those women who live in his own place of residence, he may have other wives who live with their own families.

It is not a simple matter to indicate the adjustments to married life which are made by men and women both in the great polygynous

households, and even in the more modest establishments where a man has perhaps only one wife, or, at most, two or three. There are many instances where a first wife welcomes her second, and where both join to make a place for the third. Indeed, a woman who, caring for her husband, wishes to further his position in society will, as has been observed, make it possible with her own savings for him to obtain another wife. Similarly when the four day week assigned to a given wife to cohabit with the common husband comes while she is menstruating, her co-wives arrange their time so that this conflict does not deprive her of her opportunity to be with him. And it is far from unusual for a woman to be kind to her husband's children by other women, and for a man to be as close to his children as is their mother. In essence, the great mass of Dahomean matings, either because of complacency, or of human ability to make the best of a situation, are permanent ventures which in terms of human adjustment cannot be called failures.

Nevertheless, as indicated in the discussions of various aspects of social organisation, much stress does occur, though not always on the surface, or in all households. For example, an *akwénṣi* promised in her early youth may turn out to be stupid, or disagreeable, or a scold. From a strictly legal point of view, there is nothing the man can do to rid himself of the burden of such a wife. But, should good treatment, training, persuasion and discipline, all tried severally or together prove useless, a way out is found by control that is so stringent that divorce is provoked. Again, in marriages where a woman retains control of her children, frequent or violent quarrels often bring about repudiation of the match. Indeed, the attitude of women toward "illegitimate" marriage-forms is, in the final analysis, substantiated by men with whom the matter of divorce is discussed. For when a man, who has all the advantages in a relationship, repudiates his wife by causing her to divorce him, he obviously does not esteem her highly. In fact, the men were not reluctant to admit that, in free matings, only while a woman is attractive and is at the height of her sexual powers, does she have the high regard of her husband; her position in later years, however, is in no way enviable, unless she has been sufficiently prudent with her lovers to acquire valuable gifts.

The position of a childless wife in this culture where children are so prized is not without interest, as demonstrating a rationalized attempt at social equilibrium, for not only must such a woman not be despised or returned to her family, but a childless wife, in households

comprising numerous women, may even become the favorite of her husband. One man with whom this matter was discussed gave an obviously idealized account of the matter: "They are our handsomest women, and we treat them better than the others. We say that while we are alive we must care for them well, for when we die their lot, with no children of their own to look after them, will be hard." Not only may a man not mistreat or send back a barren wife, said this man, but no co-wife would dare taunt the childless one with the fact of her barrenness, just as no woman would dare make public the impotence of her husband, for the ancestors would bring a similar state upon the reviler. This fear of punishment by ancestral spirits also dominates marriage compacts. As has been indicated, a man may not refuse a woman offered to him until definitely advised by a diviner that the match will be an ill-omened one; and it will be seen, as the discussion proceeds, how no man, in fear of impotence, may institute divorce proceedings against a wife or deny that he is the father of a child imputed to him. Yet even though the fear of ancestral punishment prevents a man from turning away a wife who has not borne children, the disadvantages which such a woman may suffer, particularly at the hands of a man who having but one or two wives resents this deeply or cruelly, are such that a barren wife sometimes arranges to give another woman to her husband (as an *akwénýsì* wife of her own), and any children born to this *akwénýsì* wife will be known as her own children.¹

Conversely, gossips whisper of compounds where the head of the household is himself impotent. In such cases the man continues to marry and to have children. It is, once more, a matter of adjustment, this time both on the part of each wife, who solaces herself with such men as she fancies and can attract, and of the husband, who winks at these escapades of his wives, and accepts their children by other men as his own.

One truism is that the greater the number of wives married to one man, the more difficult the adjustments which must be made by all members of his compound, though as is to be looked for, the personality of the husband and his judgment in distributing favors and punishments will do much to mollify this stress, or to heighten it. And always, there is the equation of the individual personalities of the women. The songs which co-wives sing against one another as they

¹ Talbot (vol. iii, pp. 431, 439, 441), records this custom for the Ibo and Ijaw of Southern Nigeria.

work in the woman's court-yard of a chief's compound are not unrevealing of this conflict. Only the lines of one of them need be quoted to illustrate their emotional tone:

"Woman, thy soul is misshapen
In haste was it made, in haste;
So fleshless a face speaks, telling
Thy soul was formed without care.
The ancestral clay for thy making
Was molded in haste, in haste.
A thing of no beauty art thou,
Thy face unsuited for a face,
Thy feet unsuited for feet."¹

The tension within the compound is particularly evident in the rôle of children in this complex situation, and in the manner of their upbringing. As has been repeatedly stated, each wife strives for the best possible position for her children in the regard of their father. Because of this, the correction of children—Dahomean children are flogged with sticks or whips, and there is no tendency to spare the rod—is, to a large extent, and especially in the larger compounds, in the hands of the mother or her relatives. For a child to be repeatedly brought before his father for punishment would make a bad impression; therefore, unless the offense is of the most serious character, a mother always strives to prevent the petty infractions of her children from coming to the ears of her husband. This, once more, gives rise to the telling of tales and of spiteful gossip, especially should the children of one mother be favored more than those of others.

On occasion, however, the adjustments necessary to the continuation of marriage cannot be made, and then divorce is the only solution. The Dahomeans recognize fully that there are circumstances when a way out must be provided, and marriage is no exception to this rule. Yet the numerous ways in which marriage may be arranged makes for equally numerous complications when these matches must be broken, and our discussion of divorce must be approached with this fact in mind.

A general principle governing divorce, already mentioned but worth detailed consideration at this time, is that a man may never divorce his wife, but must be divorced by her, since it is believed that vengeance for his taking the action will be exacted of him by the spirits of the ancestral founders of his family, whose decree he has

¹ This song may also be sung as an *avogã* song in the market-place. The translation from the Fq given here is by F. S. Herskovits.

violated. The Dahomean word for divorce, *asúgbígbe* ("husband-refuse") reflects this injunction and is one phase of a complex of attitudes toward various facets of this question. It has been seen how a man must not refuse a woman who is offered to him as an *akwénysì*. Similarly, it is conceived as a decree of the ancestors that a man accused by a girl of being the father of her child, or of having given her a first pregnancy, must not deny this charge, even though he is certain that it is false, since in this case, it is held that in making denial the man has refused a first child and hence will himself be punished, again by the ancestors, by never being permitted to have other offspring.

Insight into Dahomean psychology is had when, in the light of the principle which governs the initiation of divorce proceedings, the manner in which a man goes about getting rid of a wife for whom he has little liking is investigated. His principal weapon is a technique for making himself insupportable. Thus a wife who is not fancied by her husband is given no presents and is provided only with the barest necessities. When her turn to live with him comes, he absents himself from his house to go visiting, neither eating her food nor staying with her these nights. This treatment is regarded as the strongest disciplinary force that can be brought to bear on a woman. In a compound where many wives strive for the favor of their husband, the materials for both discipline and divorce are plentiful, because the wives who are in favor lose no opportunity to taunt those who must live unnoticed by the husband. In most Dahomean compounds a woman who, in the opinion of her husband, merits treatment of this kind, is also beaten if she breaks any of the rules of wifely conduct. This is by far the most common method of discipline, and a man who takes a thorough dislike to a wife would probably employ it much more often than he would otherwise.

It happens, however, that there are women who, in spite of harsh treatment, do not ask their families to divorce them either because of a great passion for the husband, or because social or economic reasons mitigate against the advisability of divorce. In such a case the husband must take strong measures to attain his end. When he meets the father or mother of his wife, he insults them, but, if called to account, he denies ever having done so, professing the respect that is demanded of a son-in-law. In due time a family council is called to report these insults, and the son-in-law is summoned to account for his behavior. He ignores the summons, and by his action compels

the council to pronounce a divorce between himself and his wife.

For the six forms of *akwénúsi* marriage, there are a number of definite causes which invariably result in divorce. When a man does not properly fulfil his funeral duties to his wife's father or mother, her family will take her away from him. When a brother or cousin of the husband commits adultery with an *akwénúsi* of her father, brother, or father's brother, this will also bring on divorce, since for a relative of a son-in-law to violate the wife of the father-in-law or of a member of his family is taken as indicating a general lack of respect for the girl's family. Should the husband not come in person to the annual ceremony for the ancestors of his wife's sib, divorce may result, though if a wife loves her husband and does not complain to her family, no action is necessarily taken by them. A man who insults his father- or mother-in-law in the manner described will be divorced, while if a man unjustly calls his wife an adultress, this is also regarded as valid cause for her to be taken away from him.

Under this category of marriage, divorce may also result against the wishes of both the husband and wife, as on occasion, when a woman is summoned home by her family because of a quarrel between her father and her husband, or, more often, between some member of her family and some member of her husband's family. One such occurrence has been analyzed in the discussion of the *adonevodidà* marriage-form. A woman recalled by her sib must return home whether or not she wishes to remain with her husband. If her marriage is a happy one, however, and the idea of leaving him is distasteful to her, it is not too difficult to make herself a thorough nuisance at home. Should her mother be alive, she will do all in her power to urge the girl's father to go to the sib-head and protest the divorce. If the plea is heard favorably, some small task will be imposed upon the son-in-law who, when he has performed it, is permitted to take his wife back to his compound.

Divorce bulks large directly or indirectly in *asidjosi* marriages, since marriages in this category arise out of divorce. Sometimes, when a woman is taken away from her husband, the family return to him the amount he has expended in discharging his duties to his family-in-law. They may later be recompensed for this amount through the remarriage of this daughter to another as *akwénúsi*, when he, paying his marriage dues in turn gives them what they have paid the divorced first husband of the woman. Women sometimes effect their own divorces by earning enough money by their own efforts to repay the amount their

husbands have given for them. This would occur when a woman, who had been given no cause in the behavior of her husband to request her family to divorce her had nevertheless found the match distasteful, perhaps because she wished to be free to contract a marriage with someone more to her liking. Strictly speaking, however, to obtain a divorce of this kind, a woman would have to elope with the man of her choice, and give him the money to repay her husband; the divorce would thus at the same time be a means to marriage, since she would not only be divorced but would be remarried as an *asidjòsi*. No special causes for divorce exist for other categories of *akwénjisi*, except that in the fifth marriage type, "give us and we will give you," when one woman leaves her husband the wife of the other is taken back by the family of the man who has been deserted. It is to be noted also that this type of marriage is especially liable to rupture for the third cause given in the preceding paragraph—that is, when a male of the family of one of the husbands commits adultery with a woman who is married to the father of his relative's wife.

The causes for divorce in marriages of the second group of categories may now be considered. As a general rule, marriages of this type are much more easily broken than *akwénjisi* marriages, since in these there is greater freedom reserved to the women. In the case of the first of these types, "confiding the goat to the buck," if the man who has been chosen to cohabit with the girl does not give her a child, she may simply leave him, or, if she desires, she may stay with him on terms of her own, namely, complete freedom in her relations with men. The man to whom she has been given may at any time find other men in her house, and must acquiesce in this, or she will leave him. If, however, she has borne him children, it is no longer as simple a matter for her to divorce him, particularly were both her own family and the woman who has "married" her to insist that she remain with him, since she was given to him for the purpose of producing offspring.

This also applies to the *vidõtshwé* and *vidòkpokáttá* forms of mating. A man is looked to, in Dahomean idiom, to be a responsible husband to his wife, since he had been freely chosen by the woman, and he in turn had promised to respect her family and to make her happy. This means that he must provide for his children, and that his mother-in-law must approve of the manner in which he helps his wife keep up the household. Should the wife, however, become dissatisfied with her husband, she may go to her father and explain in what ways he has been remiss in his duties. Each time the man fails to do something

expected of him, the wife speaks to her father, and when her complaints have had the desired cumulative effect, she tells her father that she is going to divorce her husband. Two differing versions of what follows were given. Some stated that it is simple for a woman married in this way to obtain divorce, since, living in the compound of her own family, she need only tell her husband she will see him no longer. Others were positive, however, that a divorce in this category rarely occurs, for the reason that the woman is reluctant to take such a step, since it is an admission of poor judgment to renounce someone she herself has chosen, and of yet poorer gifts to hold him. Should she do this, it was said, she would become the object of much derision. One man who referred to a wife of his own in this category, stated that though he was systematically neglecting her and had been doing so for some time, his wife had not renounced him, and he was convinced she would not do so. From other accounts, it would also seem that women married in those categories where choice is free are ashamed to divorce their husbands, and thus make public that they are no longer sufficiently attractive to hold the interest of their men. It was even maintained that a woman married as *vidōkpokátá* who divorces a husband, places herself in spiritual danger. If the ancestors are too deeply offended, it may mean her death, because at her marriage she made a pact with them, saying, "Behold, I give you a child to sweep your court," and in divorcing her husband she negates her vow. This, however, is a very conservative view.

The next category of marriage is that of the inherited wife. Since only *akwénísi* wives are inherited (unless there are ties of affection formed between a woman of free marriage and a son of her husband that makes her willing to go to him on the death of her spouse), then any grounds for divorce which would be valid for the original category of marriage under which the woman had been given to her deceased husband remain valid against her new husband.

The divorce of a *xadudō* is the simplest of all. Since this is the freest of marriages, a woman may leave her husband whenever she wishes, or for no cause at all. If the husband, for his part, wishes to be rid of a wife acquired in a free relationship, he makes things uncomfortable for her, and she leaves him. In the opinion of men, it is rare for a *xadudō* to leave her husband, since these marriages arise out of mutual affection. However, women sharply differ with this position, and in discussions in which both men and women participated, the men were forced to admit that divorces occur here as often as in other

marriage categories. If a man and woman married in this way separate in later life, the woman is cared for by her children.

A woman who has been given in marriage by a princess has no right to leave her husband without the consent of her patroness, and, if he works diligently for the princess who gave him his wife, this permission may be refused. However, such a case is unusual, and the consent is ordinarily given. As a matter of fact, divorce under this category is more often initiated by the patroness than by the wife, for if the princess is dissatisfied with the man's work, or wishes to take back his wife so that she can be given to another man whom she wishes to favor, divorce is pronounced.

Divorce is even more simple when the marriage of a princess is concerned, for she merely leaves the man to whom she has been given. In some cases, indeed, a princess has been known to continue living in her husband's compound, refusing him her house, and receiving other men there. It is for reasons such as this that the Dahomeans have the proverb, "A man must never count a princess as a real wife."¹

Divorce, if contested, comes before a court, for since the matter is one between families, it is not as easily disposed of as when only the man and woman are involved. That divorce occupies a great deal of the time of the courts is general testimony,² although as a rule only the *akwénísi* divorces come before the authorities. Before the conquest the King himself judged divorce suits, as otherwise there was too much opportunity for complicity between judge and plaintiff. In accordance with the principles stated above, good form dictates that a divorce suit always be contested by the husband, and that even when the man desires the divorce, he must deny it stoutly in court, admitting the while his ill-treatment of the woman. When it is recalled that many divorces are antecedent to *asidjosi* marriages, it can be seen why court

¹ The ease with which a princess was divorced obtained in Bosman's time: "This present King . . . to prevent temptation . . . married his only Daughter to the English Company's Factor here: And once talking very freely with him, I, in a jesting Manner, imposed a sort of Fine upon him for having made me the first Offer of her. He willingly paid his Fine, adding withal, that tho' his Daughter was married, she was yet at my Service, if I desired her, since one Word was sufficient to call her Home. What think you, Sir, are not this King's Daughters very cheap? But the mischief is, that marrying a King's Daughter in this Country is not very advantageous; otherwise I had not failed long since to have been happy that way." (p. 322)

² Le Herissé's comment adequately testifies as to the extent that this was true during the period of his observations: "Aujourd'hui, . . . les palabres de la Résidence d'Abomey règlent pour la plupart des difficultés conjugales." (p. 225)

procedure is so important. There are other reasons why this is so, for a threat of divorce and the summoning home of a wife is often the result of friction between two families, and offers further illustration of the extent to which an *akwénúsi* marriage is a compact between relationship groups rather than between individuals. Thus, a divorce may result from a dispute between a brother or father of a wife and some male relative of her husband over the matter of the ownership of a palm-grove, as a consequence of which the wife's family, in anger, order her home. At once the affair is brought into court. Arrived there, the contestants explain the nature of the difficulties, but before the court can separate the matter of the palm-trees from the matter of divorce, evidence is brought in, let us say, to show that there had been an early promise of marriage made between two other individuals of these families, and that, in this case, the girl had run away and the man had never recovered the amount expended on her family. Witnesses are brought from everywhere and the matter becomes progressively more confused, with the result that the divorce proceedings often become secondary and, whatever the result, the wife returns to her husband.

On occasion, a *xadudó* marriage comes into court, because when leaving her husband, the wife took away property which the husband claims is his. When summoned before the court, the woman asserts that what she took were gifts given her by the man. A common settlement in such a case is the division of the disputed property into equal parts, giving one-half back to the husband, and the other half to a child of this woman by her divorced spouse, this verdict being called "the woman washes her hands."

None the less, it must be again observed that the majority of Dahomean marriages endure, and the lives of these husbands and wives are lived according to the socially acceptable norms of conduct. Until the death of his father, the young husband lives in his father's compound, so that frequently, until he has passed the middle of his third decade of life, he continues under his father's tutelage. After this time, he establishes himself as an independent worker, farming his own fields, or following his trade. At the same time, if he comes of a property-owning family, or if he is assiduous and acquires possessions of his own, he marries more wives and his household grows as his wives produce offspring. He meets with the fellow-members of his mutual-aid societies, he plans for the future with his best friend, he provides for those dependent upon him, and he takes part in family

councils. On the death of his father, if he is the eldest son, he becomes the head of the compound which his father established, or perhaps succeeds his father as the head of a collectivity. In the days of the monarchy, if he were singled out for notice by the rulers, he might become a chief. If he has studied to become a diviner, he is by now in possession of the necessary technique and follows his profession. If he is the head of a collectivity, he may in time, if he becomes the oldest surviving male of the sib, become sib-head.

A woman, when married, and following the initial period of eight days which she spends with her husband, drops into the regime of sharing him, Dahomean week by week, with her co-wives. When her turn comes, she cooks and cleans for her husband and sleeps with him, but never joins him at a meal, since the man of the house, if friends are not present to share his food with him, always eats alone. Her meals are eaten alone in her own house or later, when she has children, in their company. She also works her own fields and helps her husband work his, or makes pottery or sells in the market, seeing to it that she augments her own resources as much as possible. These resources she may use during her lifetime to acquire, let us say, an *akwénúsi* wife for a son, or she may make periodic gifts to her children or grandchildren or husband, or her resources may enable her to leave a substantial inheritance for her children. As a widow, she is either inherited by one of her husband's sons or brothers, or is taken by one of her own sons to live with him. If she has attained old age when her husband dies, she may return to her own family, where she may become one of the *akvvi*, the women who officiate at the rites of the ancestral cult and who enjoy the greatest respect of all the members of their relationship group.

Nor is it all a matter of prestige and economic status. Both men and women actively engage in the religious life of the group as they grow older. If a child has been vowed to a deity, then, sooner or later, the long initiation ceremonies which make the child so vowed a cult member must be supported. It may be that a supernatural experience in the life of a man or woman causes him or her to be initiated in one of the religious orders. In the case of a man who has attained adulthood, when signs of illness or lack of success indicate that the time has come to go through the costly ceremonial of obtaining his full Fá, that is, of coming to know his own Fate in its entirety, he makes preparations for this. He has by this time erected his own shrine to Legbá, and, when he becomes the head of a compound or collectivity he must

"establish" his own *Da*, the spirit which has come with his umbilical cord and which, if neglected, will impoverish him or, if correctly worshipped, causes him to prosper.

In old age both men and women are greatly respected, for with age comes considered judgment, but more important, with age comes a closer affinity to the ancestral dead, and it is injudicious to act rashly with one who may any day have the opportunity to carry a grievance to the world of the dead. Unless some great and prolonged misfortunes have befallen a family, men of position or women with children have no need to fear a neglected old age. If they have grandchildren, a great deal of their time is devoted to looking after them, seeing to their education by telling them stories, and in general entering a relationship that is one of the pleasantest in Dahomean experience. Above all, a man or woman who has lived a normal life, who has raised children and who has prospered, will be assured of an adequate funeral which, in turn, will permit of a proper place in the world of the dead.

Chapter XIX

DEATH AND THE PARTIAL BURIAL

The ritual of death is one of the most dramatic in Dahomean culture. It constitutes a veritable climax to life, and through the ancestral cult, links the living with the dead. For though the Dahomean in no sense welcomes death, or is any the less eager for life, the integration of living and dying with the concept of an after-life, and, above all, with eventual deification, gives to the funeral a deep significance that is reflected in the elaborateness of the burial ceremonies.

The description that follows begins at the moment of death of an elderly man, a farmer by occupation, who was head of a compound, and who had amassed a comfortable fortune.¹ During his last illness his wives were about him, caring for him, while from time to time, at each stage of the illness, his diviner was called to determine whether or not the patient might be expected to survive. Charms of various sorts were acquired by the family to bring supernatural power to the aid of the sufferer, and with the charms came remedies of herbs, roots, and leaves. As the end approached, the children were summoned, who, with the best friend of the patient and his wives, kept a last vigil.

Now with death, the ritualized wailing ceremony, termed *avidochiô* ('tears-give-dead') is begun. All the women of the compound participate in the lament, and they are joined by the men and the children. The best friend of the dead gradually calms the wailing, and after a time, the family assemble in the house where the body lies to wash the corpse. A native sponge is used, and warm soapy water. Neither alcohol nor tobacco is added, for the washing is done as for the living.² No portion of the body is left unwashed. The washing is done by the

¹ What is given here is, in the main, based on the accounts of informants, and except for a few minor rites was not witnessed. This account is to be compared with that of Le Herissé (pp. 165-175), while the brief notes in Burton (vol. ii, pp. 107-108) and Skertchly (pp. 500-502), may also be consulted.

² The reference to the absence of tobacco and alcohol in the water was made by the one who told this portion of the ceremony to emphasize the fact that the washing was performed as on a living person, since, as will be seen, both alcohol and tobacco figure largely in the later rites, and therefore might be expected to be included.

head of the dead man's mutual-aid society who had been summoned when death seemed inevitable, by the best friend of the deceased, and by his first wife. The children assist when they are called upon. If the dead has left many children, only the older ones take part in this rite. As soon as the washing is finished, the eldest son, or best friend, shaves the head and body with a razor, to free the dead of all hair, and follows this by clipping both finger- and toe-nails.¹ This hair and the nail-parings are wrapped in a cloth and deposited beside the body so that they can be buried with it. A death-watch is now provided to see to it that the body is not left unattended. This watch is kept with rigid care, especially when the body is in the hands of the members of the *dókpuè* who actually carry out the ritual of the funeral. This is because of the opportunity a corpse affords anyone who is desirous of obtaining the means for working magic by capturing the soul of the deceased. since a bit of the dead man's cloth, or, better still, some of his hair- or nail-parings might easily be taken and used to this end. Furthermore, with such material, or with a cloth placed inside the mouth of the corpse to absorb some of the moisture remaining there, charms of great power and therefore great value could be made.

When the corpse is ready to be dressed, the box in which the deceased kept his cloths is brought out. A pair of trunks, such as all Dahomean men wear, is first placed on the body. White cotton cloth is tied about the eyes and mouth of the dead and is inserted into the ears and nostrils. the cloth about the head being of a special kind called *babrà*. When this has been done, the best friend goes to his own house, returning soon carrying a large cloth, and singing a ritual song.² When he re-enters the house of the dead he rolls the cloth, called a *gudó*, about the loins of the corpse, drawing one end up between the legs. When he has done this, he makes the observation that his friend looks well in the *gudó*, and sings.

"This day I bring you the *gudó* I promised you;
This is the day of misfortune,
The day we spoke of together;
You knew that when war came to you,
I would not fail to bring you aid;
That is why I have come."

¹ It may be remarked that the *dókpuégè*, who later will be found in complete charge of the funeral, does not figure in these preliminary ceremonies, since the time to notify him officially of the death and to summon him to the compound where the survivors mourn has not yet been reached.

² The words of this song were not obtained. The rôle of the best friend in funeral rites given here and in the pages that follow may be compared with the account given in Hazoumé, Ch. IX.

After this, the eldest son also gives a *gudô*, but this cloth need not be as large as the one brought by the best friend.

The coffin is hexagonal in shape, and on the cloth that covers it four crosses are embroidered, the cross being the symbol of *Lísa*, god of the Sun, and ranking member of the Sky pantheon. If a man belonged to a cult group, the symbols of his gods are also embroidered on this cloth, and all his other affiliations are represented by appropriate designs on the cover of the coffin. In pre-conquest days, however, coffins were used only for kings.¹ After the presentation of the *gudô*, therefore, the cadaver is rolled in a large "cloth of the dead" made especially for the purpose. So enveloped, it is placed on a mat in the house, resting either on its right or left side. A native lamp is lighted and put beside it, and the first wife and the *akovi*, an old woman of the family, who constitute the watch take their places. A bottle containing liquor is placed at the head of the corpse, another at the feet, and caury-shells are also deposited with them. This done, all the members of the family now assemble before the door of the house where the dead lies, and once more there is wailing. From this moment no cooking may be done in the house. Each son-in-law sends forty-one valls of *akásà* and a pot filled with *adôkpímà*, a gruel of maize and hot water. This food is distributed among the oldest members of the family, and among the small children. That night all the children of the dead sleep on the bare earth, for they may not use mats. It is said that at this time an *akwénýsí* who had been unfaithful to her husband must not be near the body.

Now the chief of the collectivity, or the brother of the dead, calls a council to plan for the funeral itself. Forty-one cauries are sent to the grave-digger to ask him to come and dig the grave. A messenger is sent to the *dokpwégô* with a message characteristic of the euphemisms with which references to the dead are made; the message states that this deceased head of the compound no longer wishes to respect the commands of the King. Messengers are also sent to all sons-in-law to say that "fire has fallen upon the family roof" so that each of them might send at once whatever number of *qyákpô* (brush used to extinguish a fire) have been designated.² The sons-in-law are also instructed to allow the immediate return of their wives to the family compound, that they may participate in the rituals. Finally, the one

¹ In the account which follows the customs which obtained before the conquest will be described; modern deviations from it will be noted as they occur.

² As already stated (p. 305) the number of *qyákpô* indicated by the messenger represents the number of francs the son-in-law is asked to contribute.

who has called the council sends a messenger to summon the diviner who, when he arrives, is asked to throw his lots to determine the most propitious time for the "partial" burial and for the definitive funeral.

Once the date has been set, the head of the collectivity or the brother who has called the council leaves the compound accompanied by all the principal men of the collectivity and all the dead man's sons, to call upon the head of his sib. When this delegation arrives, the sib-head sits on his stool and all the others kneel and salute him. He speaks:

"My children, I have learned of the great rain that has drenched you. It is for me to aid you."

As he says this, the one who first assembled the group kneels beside him, and all request the sib-head to name the dates for the funeral ceremonies. He must be the first to pronounce these dates, for tradition warns that any man who names them before the head of his sib will die. While the request is made, the one kneeling beside the sib-head whispers in his ear the dates indicated by the diviner. When the head of the sib hears these, his expression changes, and he cries out in feigned anger,

"Do I understand that you have fixed the dates without a decision from me?"

All throw themselves upon the ground and in chorus cry out their denial,

"O no, Dǎ, never, never!"

The old man replies,

"I am the one this great sorrow has struck the hardest blow."

Then after a pause, resumes,

"I will make the partial burial in three days, and in eleven days I will perform the final one."

The sib-head always uses the first person singular when he speaks of matters of death, because as head of the sib he "lives between the world of the living and of the dead" and he "commands" as intermediary between the living and the ancestors. Should the sib-head live in a place distant from the scene of death, then the chief of the principal collectivity of the sib may represent him at the partial burial, though he himself must be present for the final burial.

The relatives of the dead, with the head of the collectivity, now return to the compound where the body rests. It is there on the mat where it has continued to lie, watched by the wife and the *akovi*; the woman

who last cooked for the dead man while he was alive must continue to cook for him while the corpse lies in its house. Food is brought in the dishes from which the dead ate when alive, and each meal is given to the *akovi* on guard, who takes three morsels and puts them down one after the other near the corpse. She also allows water to drop three times nearby, and then tells the wife of the deceased to gather up and remove everything that has been put down. The dead man's pipe must now be placed next to him; tobacco is put into it, and it is smoked for the enjoyment of the dead man by the *akovi* and the wife who watch the body. Outside the house the funerary *zeli*, a pottery drum, is played day and night. The drummers are the members of the *dokpwè* of the quarter where the dead man lived, or if he was a villager, of his village, and it is the head of this *dokpwè* who is the commanding *dokpwégq* at the funeral.

The night following death the grave-digger comes. He is given a cock, if the deceased was a man, or a chicken, if a woman, a calabash of fresh water, four hundred and eighty caury-shells, and a bottle of liquor, so that permission may be had of the Earth to begin digging the grave. He digs with a special hoe, reserved for this purpose, and as he works the relatives of the deceased must come to greet him. The first time they give food and money and drink, and he thanks them. Each one says, "Make a fine house for my father," or "mother," "brother," "sister"—using the proper term to denote the relationship of each speaker to the deceased. A short time later all return, and they come once again to repeat this a third time. As the grave-digger sees them approaching he sings a song accompanied by the thud of his hoe, which marks the rhythm.¹ Each relative gives him money, and it is from this fact that the name of his song, *xaxóxò* ("song-buy"), is derived.

At this point, the oldest son of the deceased takes a ladder and himself goes into the grave where the work is being done, giving the digger, who is called *yokutó*, thirty-five centimes and eighty cauries, and a bottle of drink. He complains about the grave, telling the digger that it is not large enough. "I am not satisfied with it. Give me your hoe and I will enlarge it to a proper size," he says. The digger thereupon gives him the hoe, and he digs for a few moments. This custom of taking the hoe from the grave-digger is called *yomyámyá*. Coming out of the grave, the eldest son gives the grave-digger a *lobozé* (a small

¹ The words of this song were not obtained, because it is spiritually dangerous to sing it on any but the proper occasion.

pot) filled with *déníyá*, the residue of the fruit of the palm-tree when oil is made, the fruit of an astringent plant, *kpédjflékí*, and a chick. The digger takes the *lobozè*, breaks it, and throws it and its contents into the grave. This marks the completion of the grave, and after he has thrown the pot and its contents into it, he re-enters the excavation, gathers up the pieces, and takes them away. This ceremony, called *yohwiyyohwiýó*, is intended to "cool the earth," that is, to cause it to allow the dead to lie peacefully in it. When the grave is finished, it is left with a mat over its opening. Every morning thereafter, until the body is buried, the children and wives of the deceased enter the house of the dead, fall across the body and weep. Each time this is done the *akovi* takes a *lobozè* filled with *afítí* (mustard of the silk-cotton tree), and a chick, and performs a ceremony called *alisè*, to distract the mourners.¹

On the night selected to perform the partial burial, the *dokpwégq*, on his arrival, goes at once to the house of the dead. He asks the children for a large native cloth, and rolls the body in it. He then ties it with strips of cloth in three places—at the feet, at the waist, and at the head. Each of the wives and children of the deceased must give several yards of cloth to put on the body; the dead man's best friend who is in attendance also gives several yards of cloth. This ceremony of rolling the body in the cloth is called *chiodaódò* ("dead-put-large-cloth"), and is not performed inside the house unless the family are willing to destroy the dwelling in which it has taken place, for a house where this has occurred must not remain standing.

When the body has been rolled in the cloth, the *dokpwégq* gives the order to his third assistant, the *asúka*, and his general factotem, the *lègèdè*, to carry the body of the dead. They take up the corpse and as they hold it they sing:

"O children, support this body,
By its head and feet take it up.
When a man dies, his own children
Support his head.
He who lies dead is our kin,
Come, then, and support his head."

As this song is sung, all the children come in the order of age, the oldest leading, and, weeping, put money into the mouths of the two who hold the body. They throw money and cloths over the body of their father,

¹ Again no details were vouchsafed; there was always extreme reluctance to elaborate on any of the rites performed by the *akovi*.

and the *dokpwéq̃* gathers these up. The men who carry the body cry out,

"Silence! . . . *uyú, uyúyú*. We are at home here in *Djɛgbwè*,¹ still at our home in *Djɛgbwè*. When you find something, will you not make it yours? Cry out 'Yes, yes!'"

All cry out,

"Yes, when we find something, we will keep it;
What we find, we will keep."

They now begin to sing,

"A little hunchback came upon
A man with small-pox on the road, and said:
'My small-pox will be cured
But your hump never will be broken.'
Drummer, make ready your drum-stick
O *hwé, hwé, hwé*!
O my *go*,² my *go*, my *go* properly poised,
My *go*, strike well, *hwé, hwé, hwé*,
My *go*, my *go*, strike."

This ceremony is called *monogbógbò*, the rite which follows, *chíosúsó*. Six of the members of the *dokpwè* hold the body. Three on each side, they face each other with hands interlocked, the corpse resting on the outstretched arms. Their cloths are tied so they hang short, the knotted ends being thrown about the neck to hang down the back. Holding their arms rigid under the corpse, they dance with it, bending over in such a way that the ends of their cloths are thrown upwards to strike against their ears, and then straightening. The quick rhythm is set by the thudding of the feet of those who dance. So much is this dance an exhibition of strength and virtuosity, that men are relieved after a few moments by the other young men of the village who clamor for an opportunity of dancing with the corpse, and there may well be over one hundred young men standing poised and eager for their turn, to show their prowess in this difficult and honorable feat. After this had continued for the desired interval, the song is heard, sung by the *akvî*,

"Bat, oh, bat,
Return to your perch."

¹ This is the name of a quarter in Abomey; for it would be substituted the name of any other quarter or of the village where the deceased lived.

² The "*go*" is the costume described immediately below, worn by those who carry the body. Its knotted ends, hanging down the back, must be tossed so they strike the ears.

At this, the men run to the grave with the corpse as fast as possible. There the grave-digger awaits them, and receives the body. He places its head pointing toward the sea, that is, toward the south, the feet toward the north. Planks of wood are placed across the grave at a point about half way down, and dirt is thrown on top of this scaffolding. Thus the grave is only half filled, and in this fashion is left to await the final ceremony, for in the olden times the body was disinterred in seven or eight days, though today it is often left in the grave, and represented at the definitive burial by a bundle of mats. When the grave has been temporarily closed, the head of the sib sends word to all the relatives of the dead, authorizing them to resume their use of mats for sitting and sleeping, and also to resume cooking. He commands the wives of the dead to wear mourning bands over the abdomen, and orders the wives and children to throw sand on their breasts and necks. This last injunction obligates the wives and children of the deceased to go every morning from this day until the final burial to get sand from the grave to throw over themselves.

Generally a grave is dug at some place inside the compound yard. Sometimes, however, a person before his death orders that he be buried in his own house. In such a case, the grave is excavated from the outside but is actually beneath the floor of the house where the dead had lived during his lifetime. The grave is dug in one day, but sometimes the commencement of the digging is delayed, because there are certain days when graves may not be made—one of these days is *Adókwì*. The depth of the grave varies between two and four meters, the general principle being that the more important the person to be buried the deeper the grave, for more objects will be buried with him. Burial is made in the so-called foetal position, the arms and legs flexed, the body on its side. Today the type of grave termed *gbayó*, an ordinary rectangular excavation, is made, since the coffin protects the body from contact with the falling earth, but in earlier times two more complicated kinds were used. These are termed *lìyò* and *yotéhwe*, respectively those with an added excavation at the side tunnelled under the supporting earth, and those with a tunnel at one end. The body, wrapped in mats, was placed in the tunnel, so that when the grave was filled the earth would fall at the side, not on top, of the cadaver. Where the tunnel was placed at the end, the hole was closed with a large jar; if at the side of the grave, a mat was hung to protect the body from the falling earth.

After the partial interment is completed, the family prepares itself for the final ceremony. The *dokpwéq̃* goes back to his house to await the appointed day. The *akwí*, however, never leaves; she stays in the house where death occurred and where the body lay before the burial. Every night all the widows sleep there together. During the interval, the drums continue to play and there is dancing. A *zéli*, the special funerary drum, must always be one of the drums played, whether night or day. An *azq̃y*, a "spiritual guard" of palm-fronds, is placed about the house of the dead. During all this period when any member of the family goes out to perform some necessary errand in the market-place, he kneels when greeted, and the one greeting him must also kneel. Condolences which are most often lugubriously spoken, and long, are then recited. The mourners make small gifts to those who greet them in this manner, and may show no impatience or weariness, though there are always people who relish prolonging these recitals. Once the funeral rites are completed, however, there is no longer need for the mourners to be put upon by those who would weary them with their lengthy expressions of sympathy, for tradition has set it down as bad form to continue to remind an acquaintance of an affliction. Between the partial and definitive funerals each son-in-law sends whatever has been asked of him, and also brings a large native woven mortuary cloth of sixteen or eighteen strips. The married daughters of the deceased return to the mourning compound and every day they and their brothers and sisters and the wives of their father weep at the house of the dead parent. Two days before the definitive funeral ceremony, the head of the collectivity calls a council to learn from each family member how much he is able to contribute toward the cost of the funeral. All must at least join in purchasing a large cloth for the dead, known as the cloth of Hwəgbadja, the early King who, as has been seen, is held by tradition to have been the first to institute cloth weaving for purposes of burial of the dead.¹

The day before the funeral the entire family goes to the nearest market to make the necessary purchases, and on occasion one sees a group of mourners in the market, sitting in the shade of a tree while purchases are being made, and gifts are being given them. Custom dictates that everyone must buy the following four articles:

- alífɔʃʃ* — native soap
- tékà* — a native sponge
- gbágwe* — a small pot
- zq̃* — mats

¹ See above, p. 16.

Added to these, the mourners may buy what they like, for the dead can be given anything but meat and salt. Indeed, during the funeral rites, the family do not eat meat, for it is said that should they do so, they would be eating the flesh of the dead. Before leaving the market, the mourners march three times about it, going to the *aizq* to throw cauries there as an offering. On their way to or from the market, if someone meets them and makes a funeral oration, praising the deceased relative, they are expected to give him money and a white kerchief, and, since each of the mourners is supposed to donate, it sometimes happens that as much as one hundred francs is collected by a man who makes such an oration. Something of the stress under which the mourners live during this period was indicated when one man remarked that to listen to expressions of consolation is perhaps the greatest ordeal to be supported, particularly when a relative as close as a parent or brother or sister for whom one has had a deep affection, has died. Yet the dictates of custom make it impossible to avoid this.

The degree to which these condolences are elaborated may be seen in the ceremonial that takes place when the best friend of a son of the deceased comes to his mourning comrade. This occurs as soon as the friend hears of the death, and he attests, with all the hyperbole of Dahomean ritual usage, the sincerity of his friendship. He comes with a funerary drum and with singers, bringing "much drink" and soap and salt. He brings the banner of the society to which both belong, as well as another banner on which special proverbs, intended to console the mourner, have been sewn. He takes salt from a bag he carries, and pouring it on the ground to mark a straight line between himself and where his friend stands, he invites his friend to walk towards him on this path of salt, saying,

"Agó! Ágo-o-o-o-o! It is said among us that when a friend has not helped another in distress, he is no true friend. My friend, had I not come here, you would have said after the funeral of your father that you had not put your foot on any of my salt. That proverb I draw from our friendship. Here is the salt that I spread on the ground for you, on which to walk. This proves that you have stepped on my salt, and bears witness as well that you are to my taste."

His friend seated once more, he now approaches and whistles in his ear, adding,

"Your father is dead. If I had not come to you, then after the funeral of your father, you would have said you had had no news of me."

He next takes two bottles, one filled with a sweet-smelling liquid, the other with a liquid of foul odor. He gives his friend the first to smell, then smells it himself; he gives him the second, and also smells it, saying as he does this,

"The proverb says that a person who eats the good things with another must also be willing to share the bad with him. I have smelled the good odor with you, and since it is said that false friends never care to smell the bad odor, I have smelled the bad. That proverb I draw from our friendship for I, too, feel the misfortune that has come to you."

He then takes a large piece of cloth and says,

"Among us, it is said that the false friend does not even offer a kerchief to dry his friend's tears. This proverb I bring forth from our friendship. In place of a kerchief, here is a large cloth with which to dry your tears."

He takes a small drum, and, placing it against the ear of his friend, taps it several times. Doing the same against his own ear, he says,

"Among us it is said that false friends never like to hear the sound of misfortune. I am not one of those, for I prefer to share with you the evil sounds death has played in your ears."

Taking a stout rope, he ties one end about his own arm and the other about that of his friend, saying,

"My friend, do not believe that when misfortune comes I shall not be with you. We are joined to each other by the same cord."

He presents to his friend the palm of his hand, in which lie a red and a white kola, and tells him to take one. The friend takes the white one and the other says,

"I knew you would take that, for I know that our friendship is indivisible like the white kola. We are not as the red one, which can easily be divided."

He continues in this strain until the similes called for by the occasion are exhausted. It is in this manner, then, that the mourners are given ritual consolation.

The evening of the day on which the family goes to the market marks the beginning of the final funerary rites. By nine or ten o'clock people from all parts of the city are assembled in the compound where the ceremonies take place, if the deceased was a resident of Abomey or another center, or from neighboring villages, if he was a countryman. When all are gathered, the crowd separates into its component parts; each son makes a group with his wives and children and his friends and

the members of his societies; each son-in-law, and each daughter, does the same.

Every son-in-law of the deceased is obligated by custom to furnish a funerary drum, termed *asito zɛlí*, and the drummers of these drums, together with the followers of the sons-in-law of the deceased, are grouped some distance from the compound. Each of the daughters of the dead man brings a *ɣálá*, a basket containing small kerchiefs, money, and bottles of drink, to the head of the collectivity where the ceremonies are being performed, to show him what she has to spend for the night's ceremony. Each leaves her basket with him, and is instructed to call her best friend. With the best friend come the members of the daughter's society and other friends of her own age who are to be with her.

At this point the head of the collectivity gives the order to summon the *zɛlí* brought by the husband of the oldest daughter of the deceased. This son-in-law, with his drum, comes singing, accompanied by his friends and the members of his society. The members of the mourning household advance from the door of the compound to meet this group. They have with them a calabash of water and a bottle of rum, and when the two groups meet, the *dokpwégá* of the village from which the *zɛlí* has come takes this water and sprinkles the earth three times, then takes the bottle of drink and repeats the process. He brings the *zɛlí* itself and the members of the family throw money into the drum, for the *zɛlí*, it will be recalled, is a pottery jar which is played by beating against its mouth with the hand and is, therefore, a ready receptacle for these gifts. Each of the children of the deceased takes one kerchief—the color is of no importance—and ties it about the neck of the *zɛlí*, and then ties another about the head of the drummer. In addition to this funerary drum, the battery of instruments brought by each son-in-law includes two other pottery drums termed *kpézí*, which differ from the *zɛlí* in that they have skin heads, two *gá*, or metal bells struck with wood or iron to keep a rhythm, and two *asá*, which are rattles made of woven bamboo. Kerchiefs are also given to the men who play these instruments. When this orchestra has finished playing, its members and those who accompany it retire and choose a place inside the compound where they take their stand. The *zɛlí* of the son-in-law whose wife is second oldest, with its supporting instruments, and the group who accompany it, is now summoned, and the same ceremony is repeated for this group. In order of precedence, each group is brought in until all the orchestras supplied by the sons-

in-law have taken their turn. That any son-in-law would not have a band present when summoned is unthinkable. Should this occur, however, nothing is said at the time, but, as has been indicated, the wife of this man is not permitted to return to him when the funeral is over.

The sons-in-law having been thus summoned, it is now the turn of the sons. Each of these, beginning with the oldest, brings a *zèlí* and the same performance that marked the introduction of the bands furnished by the sons-in-law is repeated for each of those of the sons of the deceased. When all the bands have thus entered the compound, the order is given for all the *zèlí* to play. Each group sings as the drums are beaten, and though the rhythm is the same, no two groups sing the same song. The result is, of course a deafening volume of sound, which is desired, since the greater the volume, the higher the standing of the deceased in the next world, and, incidentally, the more the satisfaction felt by the family.¹ Each daughter now goes to the *zèlí* brought by her husband, and gives presents to the players and singers who have come to honor her dead father. At this ceremony there is no weeping; indeed, during the whole of the definitive funeral there is little expression of grief, for this is regarded as "a feast for the father," and it is thought that the dead man himself dances behind the compound where he had lived, but being dead, he dances in the manner of the dead, head on the ground and feet in the air.

While the *zèlí* are playing inside the compound, the *dokpwégq* in charge of the funeral remains outside. In the space called *agǔ*, which is before the main entrance to the compound, he causes temporary houses to be constructed. These temporary houses, called *agbloɣwí*, are made of mats with openings facing the same way; one is for the *dokpwégq* and his suite, the other is reserved for the mourning family. After the singing and drumming within the compound have continued for some time, the *dokpwégq* sends word to stop the *zèlí*, and asks the children to prepare themselves for the actual ceremony of burial. He sends his crier, the *agutagq*, who, on entering the compound calls out:

"Silence! Silence! Be quiet! The *dokpwégq* who commands, bids me come and say that the people of the household shall come to the *agǔ*; that all outsiders shall come to the *agǔ*. The *dokpwégq* bids me say that he is there awaiting them."

¹ It is such moments that furnish the Dahomean with the greatest conviction of the worth of many children.

This announcement is essential, because it is decreed by custom that mourners may never appear at the *agǔ*, the cleared space in front of the compound, without an invitation from the *dokpwégǔ*. After the crier has delivered his message no one responds to its summons, for it is only a first notice. They send drink, tobacco, and matches to the *dokpwégǔ* in charge of the ceremony, however, with the message that since it is cold, and therefore improper that a distinguished man should feel discomfort, they are sending him something to drink and smoke. They also send mats on which he can sleep in the open, under his parasol called *plixó*. This interchange is called *sí hwule dokpwé*. After a time, the crier returns to the compound repeating the summons, but once more the family do not respond. They say it is only the second signal, and this time they send word to the *dokpwégǔ* that they will come presently. There is another interval, after which the crier issues his summons a third time, and now all those inside the compound leave for the *agǔ*. The friends and members of the societies to which the relatives of the deceased belong take their stools with them, but the mourners must sit on the earth. The members of the family arrange themselves before their temporary open house, each person next to his best friend, who carries the basket full of the gifts which each mourner has provided. The other friends stand apart, finding places as best they may. Now native lamps, of the type called *fǔ meq̃η tágbwé*, made of small pottery jars, are lighted. A great many of these are used during the night and each must be watched so that it does not go out, for should one be extinguished it would presage the approaching death of another member of the family.

A messenger is now dispatched to the *dokpwégǔ* in charge to inform him that they have come in answer to his summons. The *dokpwégǔ* instructs them to come to him, and all the mourners carrying bottles of rum, money, and small cloths come before him and kneel. All raise their arms, rubbing the palms of their hands together in the gesture of supplication, and say,

“Let the *légèdè* salute the *dokpwégǔ* for us!”

This official also kneels, facing his chief and, raising his arm in the traditional manner of salutation, says,

“The bereaved family greets the *dokpwégǔ*!”

Hearing this, the *dokpwégǔ* beats two fingers against his palm, crying,

“*Mexó*, the ancients, salute you!”

He now instructs them to return to their places, and when the members of the family have settled themselves once more in the temporary house, they give fifty centimes to the crier for the *dokpwégq*, and ask him to transmit the message that the family begs the *dokpwégq* to order them to proceed with the ceremony. When he receives the money, the *dokpwégq* sends back word that he cannot as yet do what is requested of him, because he had not received his drink, adding the admonition that when a request is made of a *medáxo*—an elder—his mouth must be washed for him that he may speak. The family thereupon sends the crier back with a bottle of rum “to wash the mouth of the *dokpwégq*.”

The cloth toward the purchase of which all members of the family have contributed, and which is held inside a raffia sack by the eldest son, is now produced. The son adds five francs and a bottle of drink to it, and sends all to the *dokpwégq*, who designates two men of his *dókpwe* to assist his subordinate in handling this cloth. The three untie the sack and, taking the cloth from it, unfold it, stretch it out to its full length, then re-fold it lengthwise and strike the earth with it. The cloth is unfolded once more, and two of the men, holding it at either end, show how large it is. As they do this, the principal one of the two criers on duty—for two of them must be present, one relieving the other as his voice shows strain—cries out,

“Attention! Silence! To him who is no longer living, King Hwəgbadja has rented a parcel of earth. Today we give [Hwəgbadja], the King of Allada, a large mortuary cloth of twenty strips. It is he who has decreed that men should cover the bodies of the dead; that the feet of the dead might not be seen; that the hands of the dead might not be seen.”

The second crier then takes up the bottle of liquor, displays it, and cries,

“Heed ye! Heed ye! To him who is no longer living Hwəgbadja gives this drink. Here it is. The King had said that drinks must be drunk when a man is dead.”

Now the first crier takes the five francs and cries,

“To him who is no longer living, Hwəgbadja gives this money. Here it is. The King has said that he brings it to pay for food bought on the road travelled by the dead.”

When these formulae have been recited, the cloth is put in the center of the cleared space, the money is given to the *dokpwégq*, and the bottle

of drink is placed on the ground in front of him. The *dokpwégg* now says,

‘Let the mourning family kneel,’

and motions to the other *dokpwégg* who are assisting him, and who are with him in his shelter also to kneel. He shows the cloth, the drink, and the money and praises Hwɛgbadja, speaking of him as though he were still living.

“All that the King does is good. The King goes to the hunt; the hunt is successful. The King goes to war; the war ends in victory. I, the *dokpwégg*, praise the King.”

The family, kneeling, repeat the praises of Hwɛgbadja uttered by the *dokpwégg* and add,

“Wood that is brought gives fire. The King has lived in this house; and even those who are not yet born to our mourning family must praise the King.”

It is at this point that the definitive funeral actually begins. The provisional burial, the preparations in the interval between it and the present ceremony, and the events of the evening that preceded this moment were but preliminary to the service which sends forth the soul of the dead on the path to the world of the dead.

Chapter XX

THE DEFINITIVE BURIAL

It is about ten o'clock on the night of the definitive funeral of the head of a compound who has died, leaving a large group of wives and children to mourn him. These, with their friends and members of the societies to which they belong, are gathered at the compound where the deceased lived. At the *agǝ*, the cleared space before the entrance, two temporary houses made of mats can be discerned in the flickering lights of the many native lamps that illuminate the scene. In one of these mat-houses sit the mourning family, in the other the *dokpwégǝ* in charge of the funeral services. This official, *dokpwégǝ* of the village or quarter of the city where the deceased had resided, is surrounded by his retinue, composed not only of the members of his own *dókpwé*, but also the several *dokpwégǝ* who head all the other *dókpwé* that, accompanying the funerary *zéli*, have been brought by the sons and sons-in-law of the dead man to honor him. Shortly before this, the eldest son of the dead man has requested the *dokpwégǝ* to open the ceremonies of the definitive burial, but has been informed that it is necessary to "wash the mouth of the *dokpwégǝ*" before this request can be heeded, and has, accordingly, supplied a bottle of drink. Now once more this son sends fifty centimes to the officiating *dokpwégǝ*, asking him to open the ceremonies, and this time the *dokpwégǝ* accedes.

The *agutagǝ* who receives a large mortuary cloth from the eldest son, calls out, as he strikes the earth with it,

"Heed ye! Heed ye! To him who is here no longer comes his oldest son. He gives a mortuary cloth of fifteen strips and one eye¹ and says it is for covering the dead."

This cloth is placed beside the cloth of Hwɛgbadja, and to it the son adds a pair of breeches (*chokoto chaká*), a shirt (*awǝ*), a clay pipe (*kókó*), a cap (*bôně*), a mat (*zǝ*), a pot to hold water (*zágǝgwě*), soap (*alífǝfǝ*), a sponge (*těkǝ*), and water (*sǝ*). As each article is given the *agutagǝ*, he announces what the eldest son has given, as he

¹ This is in reality a cloth of sixteen strips.

had done for the mortuary cloth, and designates its use. Each gift is acknowledged by the *dokpwégq* as it is added to the pile. Before the gift-giving of the eldest son is concluded, he must add a bottle of drink and five francs—the money being known as *avodjikwé* (money-after-cloth)—for the officiating *dokpwégq*.

The eldest son is followed by the best friend of the deceased, who gives the same type of mortuary cloth. The two criers unfold it as one of them calls,

“Heed ye! Heed ye! The best friend of him who is here no longer placed the loin-cloth about the body of his friend, and said ‘My friend, this cloth becomes you well.’ He came not to the *agǔ* without tears. Now he offers a cloth of fifteen strips and one eye to cover his friend.”

When this cloth is being presented, all shout approval, for the doner is redeeming the promise of the first friend not to come empty-handed to the *agǔ* of his friend’s funeral. To the mortuary cloth he adds a pipe, a pair of breeches, a shirt, and a cap, a mat, some soap, a sponge, a pot of water, and ends as the eldest son has ended with the gift of a bottle of drink and five francs to the *dokpwégq*, before he returns to his place.

The eldest daughter makes the next offerings to the dead. Beginning with the mortuary cloth, she gives all her eldest brother has given, but substitutes a narrow strip of cloth called *adǔ*, used as a kind of belt in the olden times, for the breeches. In addition, she gives a cloth called *adjokǔ to madje kwǔ* (“*adjoko*-river-crossing-go-toward-death”), the cloth that carries the dead across the river of death. It is composed of two widths, and is only given at the funerals of men who have had daughters. The remaining sons, and then the daughters, according to age, present their gifts. In behalf of her husband, each daughter adds one franc four centimes, a sum equal to forty times four cauries, and called *alǔ dǔ adǔ* (“hand-put-mortuary cloth”).¹ No child may at this time give more lavishly than any of the others, yet not even an infant is exempt from any of the ritual gifts required of his elder brothers and sisters.

With the offerings of the children and the best friend concluded, the remaining friends of the dead come forward, one by one, with their offerings. Many of them display cloths decorated with appliqué figures designating proverbs, which are recited and interpreted by the donors of the cloths. Such appliqué cloths are made for the

¹ It is perhaps significant that when a woman divorces her husband, this is the first sum her family is asked to repay.

occasion, and customarily, those who present them are accompanied by the members of their societies, who, with the donor as leader, either sing the proverbs or preface their recital and the explanation of their meaning with songs. Each friend makes a gift of one sou (five centimes) to the *agɔtagɔ*, this being termed *gbégbà* ("voice-open") and designed to induce the crier to speak.

The friends are followed by the remaining relatives of the deceased. If there is a pregnant woman among them, she must not be named, but instead the crier must replace her name with the phrase "*Ma yolo ni ché-ó!*—Do not call my name—o!" These relatives are expected to supply only a mortuary cloth, though if one of them has not "found" a cloth—that is, could not afford a cloth, or was unable to go to market to buy one, or could not procure the proper type of cloth at the market when it was sought there—then such a person is permitted to make a gift of money. In announcing this type of gift, the *agɔtagɔ*, stating that the donor has been unable to buy a proper cloth, names the sum given. Although the number of cloths presented, as described here, seems large, nevertheless it must be borne in mind that the funeral which is being described is that of a commoner. For, to quote one Dahomean, "At the funeral of a great dignitary it is impossible even to count the cloths."

As the presentation of the first offerings by the family and the friends draws to a close, the eldest son again advances. This time he brings with him another yard of cloth and eighty caury-shells. The *agɔtagɔ* cries out, "Heed ye! Heed ye!" and the others answer, "Heed ye! Heed ye!" The crier calls:

"To him who is dead, the family have made gifts of cloths to reach as far as Zú, and as far as ʔá, that he may be well covered; and they have given him eighty cauries."

On behalf of the family, the eldest son again advances with three more pieces of cloth, each about a yard long. One is for all the male dead of the family, one is for all the female dead, while the third is for all the women of other families who died after marrying into this family. In giving these, the eldest son asks his father to present them to those men and women and wives of the family who have died when, in the world of the dead, these relatives greet him upon his arrival, and ask him for a gift from those still on earth.

The *dokpɔwégɔ* now instructs three men of his *dókɔwè* to bring rattles and gongs. At this time the *akɔvi*—the old woman of the family who had watched the body of the dead—approaches, accompanied by

the grave-digger. She takes up the cloth of Hwəgbadja—the first gift of the eldest son—and wraps it about herself. The grave-digger takes two cauries, and as the *akvĩ* goes toward the house where the body of the dead man lay, he holds each between his thumb and first two fingers, striking one against the other in a rhythmic accompaniment of the song of the *akvĩ*.¹ As she nears the house where the body lay, she utters her cry, "*Kukú hukwĩ! hukwĩ!*" and enters, kneeling there for a time, and then returning to the *agǝ* where the family, the *dokpwégǝ* and the spectators await her. All are silent as she goes and returns, and no one stirs, for anyone unfortunate enough to meet her while on this errand would be certain to die in a very short time. Arrived again at the *agǝ*, she turns her back upon the *dokpwégǝ*, who throws money at her. She makes her way to the *agǝ* where the children are grouped and turns her back upon them, whereupon they, too, throw money at her. This done, she drops the cloth she is wearing and retires.

The best friend of the dead now chooses a man to represent him. This man swathes himself in the cloth the *akvĩ* has dropped, picks up another and wraps it about his head, a third he holds in a manner to simulate the bearing of a horse-hair switch at ceremonies for the dead, and he takes up a pipe that has been given the dead. The children of the dead present five yards of cloth, a mat, and another special mortuary cloth, and the *dokpwégǝ* orders his *asúka* to place the body of the dead man in a mat, which ceremony is known as *chío dō zq' mē*, ("dead-put-mat-place"). Since the body is already in its grave and it is no longer customary to exhume it, the corpse is represented by one of the large cloths from the offerings of the children, which is rolled and placed inside the mat they have presented for the purpose, and lies in the house where death occurred. In the days of the kings, however, the grave was uncovered at this time, the planks which had been inserted were removed, and the body, whatever its state of decomposition, was taken out and used in this ceremony. When this occurred, all concerned with handling the corpse or whose rôle compelled them to approach it, used quantities of perfume or scented herbs to dissipate the foul odor of the decaying body.

With the body of the dead, or its simulacre, in place, the members of the *dókpwè* who have been entrusted with its care return to the *agǝ*. The time is now about two-thirty in the morning, and the

¹ Since it is regarded as extremely dangerous for this song to be sung except in its proper place, it was not possible to get either the words or music.

dokpwégq summons the man who represents the best friend of the dead man, giving him money and drink. This man proceeds toward the house where the body once again lies, accompanied by all the members of the *dókpwe*, singing funeral songs to the rhythm of rattles and gongs. The one who represents the best friend sings:

"My friend is dead.
Would that my friend were still in life,
Would that something might be found
To bring my friend back to life."

When the group arrive where the dead lies, all kneel and sing:

"Behold what death has done!
What death has done to a family.
Friend and friend are united,
The death of one leaves the other in grief.
The song itself cries out, and it says
'Behold what death has done!
What death has done to a friend.' "

As this song comes to end, all rise and return to the *agq*, singing:

"I went to drink with my friend
And I did not find him.
O death! thou killest without a trial,
One day I will see him again,
Yes, one day I will see him again
For I, too, am going toward death."

When the representative of the best friend arrives at the *agq* he repeats the ceremony of the *akovi*, turning his back first to the *dokpwégq* and then to the family, while they throw money at him.

The preceding rite is of about a half hour's duration. When it is concluded, the *dokpwégq* orders the cloths to be folded. This is done to the accompaniment of song:

"Truly death spoils all things!
Death, thou spoilest the good things.
Clap your hands
That the house may be sweet,
For death spoils all things.
A great thing has all at once become small.
Were it not that war had changed all things,
Do you think this ceremony would be so small?"

The cloths of native manufacture are counted separately from those of European make, and with the enumeration finished, the *agutagq*

announces the number in his loudest voice, and the announcement is followed by this song:

"A man must bring forth children,
If his death is to be a fine one.
Yes, a man must not fail to bring forth children,
If his death is to be a fine one.
For a man must be buried with many cloths,
Since it [death] is not a thing for a child."

The cloths of Dahomean manufacture are divided into three equal parts, and the first part, which comprises the cloths given by the children, are used to cover the body in the grave. They are called *àvó yu dō yò* ("cloth-killed-for-grave"). The second part goes to recompense the *dokpwégà* and his suite, and is termed *dìkpò* ("burial-remain"). The third group of cloths is termed *àgǔ fẹ́* ("place-of-ceremony-divide"), and these are for the children themselves. To the collection of cloths destined to be placed in the grave are added those given by the best friend.

During the interval occupied by the counting of cloths, the following farce is enacted. Two men who were casually acquainted with the dead, or who did not know him at all—simple folk, or perhaps members of the *dókpwè*—come forward, and each begins to argue loudly that he was the best friend of the dead. This by-play is called *xɛntɔ nwɛlé nwɛlé* ("friend-argument"). The *dokpwégà* summons them to appear before him to present their claims. The first exclaims,

"I am the best friend of him who lies dead. When this man here (pointing out his opponent) was still in his mother's womb, the one who is dead instructed me to come and gather up all his possessions when he should be here no longer. So I have come to take all the inheritance, but now this man bars my way."

The second replies,

"He who is dead was my best friend. Our friendship goes back many years. We became friends when this man's mother was still a child. He who is dead said I was to come and get his inheritance. Now this man keeps me from it."

These pronouncements are followed by a mock fight, which the *dokpwégà* finally ends, saying,

"Inasmuch as neither of you has any proof to offer in support of your claims, here is one caury. Go and divide it between you."

At this, both turn on the *dókpwégq* and begin to berate him, demanding to know how one caury can be divided. This dramatisation, which fills time that would otherwise be tedious, is said to be introduced to amuse the dead. If, when it is over, the cloths are still being counted, those who are about watching the distribution introduce humorous asides and observations calculated to produce laughter, for this interlude is conceived as the last amusement the dead will participate in, and it is therefore felt that it should be as entertaining as possible.

The division of cloths occupies about an hour and a half, and when it is finished the *dókpwégq* orders his second in command to take the cloths destined for the grave to the house where the body (or its representation) lies, and to bring out the corpse in its mat. The *asúfagq* summons all the *dókpwè* to assemble in front of the house of the dead while he himself enters. The ceremony of *chiósúsó*, which has been described,¹ is now repeated, but this time it lasts longer and takes on a more boisterous quality than it had on the first occasion. Either the corpse itself, if it has been recovered from the grave, or the representation is employed, and often one of the *dókpwè* lies down beside it, both being supported by the six young men then holding the body. There are scores of *dókpwè* eagerly waiting their turn, and every ten minutes or oftener the bearers are changed. The song of the *asúfagq* sung while the young men carry the corpse is:

“We have arrived to transport thy body,
The children of Djesgbwè take thee,
And into the sea thou wilt fall.”²

This dancing with the body of the dead proceeds within the compound wall for a half an hour or more, while many songs are sung, until the *dókpwè*, with the dead body, of a sudden cut through the “hedge” and escape.³ The shouting, singing men are followed by the children of the dead who carry money and drinks with them. The body is taken through the quarter or the village out into the bush, to the home of the first friend, into the house of relatives, and to the important cross-roads, and everywhere the bearers are followed by the mourners

¹ See above, p. 358.

² The Dahomeans hold that if the funeral of a man is well conducted, a falling star is seen. This star is believed to be the spirit of someone recently deceased and it is said that all falling stars go into the sea. This is important, because it is held by some that it is through the sea that the way to the land of the dead lies.

³ When someone dies, a narrow section of the compound wall is torn down to make a “hedge” through which the cadaver may enter and leave. If this has not been done, then at this time the members of the *dókpwè* tear down enough of the wall to make a “hedge.”

beseeking them to return the body of their father to them. "Now is when a young man gets money," said one Dahomean, for all who hear the clamor follow the corpse, throwing gifts of money at those who carry it. The *lègèdè* gathers up this money and keeps it for later distribution.

This continues until daylight—that is, until a short time before six o'clock in the morning. At this time the *dokpwégè* sends a message to the *asúfaḡa*, who leads back the group to the village, to return, for the sun is rising. The *asúfaḡa* sends back word that for his part he is ready to return but that the dead man is not. The *dokpwégè* then sends another message, this time to the members of the family, instructing them to give more gifts to the dead that he may consent to come home. Thereupon children and relatives again give cloths and money. The *dokwégè*, however, must still wait an hour or more before the group returns, entering through the hedge." The body is taken back to its house, and the *dokpwégè* enters it, and sings:

"Come hold him by the head,
Children, come hold him by the feet,
Let the kin of the dead¹ come and hold him by his head,
One of our kinsmen is dead."

As he sings this, the members of the family hold the body by the head and feet, and the wives and children come to face the dead. First the children approach and once again give money, yards of cloth, and drinks. This ceremony, known as *màdḡgbúḡbo*, is held to permit the deceased to speak in the world of the dead—that is, enough must be given so that he will not be ashamed of insufficient possessions in his new home. After the children have made their contributions, the wives of the dead man come forward, and, as each gives her gift, she must touch the body, or the mat in which a cloth or log of wood has been placed to represent the body. Those who have been unfaithful to their husband do not approach, for if they do so they will fall dead.

It is at this point that the *Fá* which had guided the man's destiny during his life, and the *Legbá* which he had erected before his house to care for him, are destroyed. Seven times the diviner comes and asks at the entrance of the compound if he may enter. The first time he is told, "The head of the compound is lying down." The second time, "He is asleep." The third, "He is ill." The fourth, "The illness is grave." The fifth, "He is in agony." The sixth, "He is dead."

¹ i. e., his children.

When the diviner repeats his question a seventh time, he is told they are about to bury the one for whom he enquires.¹ When the diviner is informed that burial is about to take place he replies "Then I must enter to separate his gods from his body and to tell his guardian spirit to leave." He comes into the house, and is given a large raffia cloth, two goats and one cock. He goes to the center of the house and sits on the ground, asking that he be brought the *Fá* and the *kpóli* belonging to the deceased.² The diviner, instead of tracing the *dù*³ in pulverized white clay on a wooden tray, as is ordinarily done, throws the palm-kernels and traces the answers on the earth. He first inquires of the dead man's Fate if this is the day of departure designated by Mawù, or whether an accident had brought death. If the answer indicates that it was an "accident," nothing is done at the time, but a note is made of this and after the funeral ceremonies are over, a quiet investigation is carried on to determine who was instrumental in bringing about the death.⁴ The diviner now asks for palm-oil, and taking a large funeral cloth, throws the dead man's personal instruments for divining into this cloth, and kneels before them. As the children of the dead kneel with him, he says,

¹ The version followed here is that of informants who gave the most complete description of burial customs. However, another account of this ceremony holds that the diviner comes at about 8 o'clock in the evening of the day of the burial, and that after he asks his seven questions he is told that the corpse is to be buried that night. Probably both accounts are true; indeed, it is quite possible that this ceremony may take place at still other times of the day or night.

² These paraphernalia of the Fate cult will be described later when the religious life of Dahomey is considered.

³ That is, the combination of lines made after seeing the result of throwing the palm-kernels. It is these combinations on which the diviner bases his statement.

⁴ This investigation is usually made by a priest of the Earth cult, or by a diviner of the type called *bokantɔ*. In the former instance, the priest is given a mixture of palm-oil and pepper called *amidjã*, cornmeal, a small chick, a small jar (*lobozɛ*), black and white raffia threads doubled and intertwined, tobacco, and seventy-five centimes in cauries. The pot is placed upside down upon the ground and the chick is tied with the raffia threads. The cauries are divided into two parts, and these are rubbed over the pot until a voice is heard from within it; this is the voice of the dead. The priest calls on this voice to tell what has happened to him, and what his wishes are. If he had been poisoned, for example, he will say so. In some cases the name of the person who killed him is given, and in others, when the murderer is named, the voice instructs that the matter not be prosecuted. In such instances the deceased asks for powder—that is, powder to "declare war" against his murderer—and a cock is also demanded. When these are given, the guilty party will die, for the death will be avenged by the dead man himself. Needless to say, this entire proceeding is conducted with the utmost secrecy; it is usually held in the house where the dead person died. On such occasions, it is said, the spirit of the deceased also may transmit instructions concerning the disposal of his property and the division of his wives.

"Your hammock-man¹ was always devoted to you. Each time he called me it was to give you food, to give you renewed strength, because it is you who are the guardian of the earth from which he was molded. This earth you have allowed to fall to the ground, and since without him you will no longer have work, we,² the diviners, come today to drive you away from the soul whose destiny you ruled. You will no longer be respected. The body you watched over has been killed. You, too, will be killed today."

Inasmuch as Fá never "eats" *ataki* (pepper), *afití* (mustard), or the cock—that is to say, these are never sacrificed to Fá—the diviner, after pouring oil on the divining apparatus of the dead, and telling the children to turn their heads away that they may not witness the desecration about to be committed, throws pepper and mustard on the cloth and its contents and over all pours the blood of the cock. When this is done the Fá and the *kpóli* depart.

The diviner next takes a male goat and a large stick, and proceeds to the dead man's Legbá shrine at the entrance to his compound, where kneeling, he addresses the spirit within as follows:

"I kneel before thee, O King, Destroyer-of-all-things,
Who-eats-and-leaves-the-mouth-soiled.
Thou-of-the-thick-lips, *Djokolí kitá*, *Ámáńfó*,
Gbogwínò, *Vósú Vóló Vódó*.³

Having said this he resumes,

"From the day you were brought here, you have watched over this house. You were always given food. Today we, the *bokónò*, come to break you, and to take away the earth in which you dwell, for the man you have been guarding is dead. You must not remain here. You must give way to another."

Since Legbá never "eats" the male goat, the *bokónò* sacrifices this animal to him, allowing the blood to drip over the statue, and follows this by swinging his club and shattering the earthen image.

This done, he once more takes up the cloth and throws away the divining materials in the manner prescribed for each. The *kpóli* is cast into a stream, but the Fá itself is taken care of in the way decreed by itself in the last consultation. There are those Fá who ask to be thrown away at the cross-roads, others may request to be buried with the owners, while still others demand to be placed in a pot of palm-oil and kept in the house where the ancestors are worshipped. The

¹ That is, the dead man, who was bearer of his own fate.

² The diviner always speaks of himself, when acting in his official capacity, in the plural.

³ These are "strong" names of Legbá of which translations could not be obtained.

last choice reveals that this particular Fá had become the guardian of a number of men and women of the household. Whatever the mode of disposal, the "killed" Fá is now termed Fakútó—a dead Fá. When the *bokónɔ* leaves, the officiating *dokpwégɔ* arrives to take away the small thatch shelter which protected the Lɛgbá shrine, and throws the wood and the clay of the shattered image into the bush. He then returns to clear the ground where Lɛgbá had stood, doing this so painstakingly that no trace of its existence remains.

Once the Fá and the Lɛgbá are destroyed the *dokpwégɔ* orders the body, or the representation of it, to be taken to the grave, and the young bearers do their errand on a run. If it has not already been re-excavated, the grave is now re-opened, and perfume is freely sprinkled about to overcome the stench of the decomposing corpse. Today European perfume is used for this purpose, but in earlier days one made of crushed almonds and palm-oil, mixed with fragrant herbs and seeds was employed.¹ The *dokpwégɔ* sits at the grave, and before him are the cloths destined for burial with the dead. It is about eight o'clock in the morning. The children of the dead, his friends, and all the members of his family are called to see the body, and as each approaches weeping, there are ritualized outcries of grief from those who witness the ceremony. The *dokpwégɔ* says:

"If there is something else you have to give, give it now."

At this, the mourners run to their houses and again bring forth gifts. Only the family and the immediate friends of the dead are permitted within the compound during this rite. The *dokpwégɔ* sings,

"Today you look upon your father for the last time,
See him there! [pointing]
The makers of salt have thrown their salt into the water,
This salt you will not see again."

The *dokpwégɔ* gives the cloths to the grave-digger one at a time. If a mat has been employed to represent the cadaver, the grave-digger must now take up the real corpse so that a new mat on which it is to lie can be placed underneath it. He then covers the body with the new cloths. Now those who wish to send gifts by this newly deceased person to their own family dead—to a mother, a father, a husband, a son or a daughter—present them and the *dokpwégɔ* instructs the

¹ The names of these ingredients in native perfume are: *gbedjelekɔ*, *sasalikwi*, *tkɛ*, *mɛhweku*, *ywáywádo*. No identifying names for them were obtained, nor could specimens be gathered.

dead man to deliver each gift to the one for whom it is designed. The *dokpwégè* sings first to the sender,

"Come give me something,
That I may send it to your father."¹

Then, turning to the body, he sings,

"When you see them there below,
Tell them these are for them."

Again addressing the mourners:

"Cover the head of the *dokpwè* (with cloths)
Bring gifts that this dead may take to the land of the
dead."

Such gifts are commonly cloths, and as they are presented, the *dokpwégè* places them with the burial cloths inside the grave. The *asúka* now calls for a jar with which to close the opening into the tunnel where the body lies. His request, like the others of this ceremony, is sung:

"The pot rolls
But no one will see it.
The great *dokpwégè* buys drinks;
Oh, *dokpwè*, if they call you,
Give it to them."

The pot in position, the *yokutó* takes a hoe, and with the help of the young men of the *dokpwè*, fills the grave.

Thus at about nine o'clock in the morning, in the ordinary type of funeral, the grave would be finally closed. But this does not as yet conclude the ceremonies at the grave, for the grave must next be stamped down. Strong men are chosen from the *dokpwè*, and the stamping follows a slow rhythm, very little surface being covered at one time. The song the *dokpwè* sings to drum accompaniment is:

"The planter gathers his peppers;
And *xetagblé* weeps, and weeping says,
'Life has given me an evil portion'."²

When the members of the *dokpwè* have trampled down the grave, they are followed by the children of the deceased who repeat this rhythmic stamping, and the children are followed by the wives and the other relatives, so that all who had had close ties with the dead participate—

¹ The proper term to designate the deceased relative of the giver for whom the gift is intended may be substituted.

² *Xetagblé* is a bird that feeds only on peppers; hence, when the farmer gathers his peppers, the bird has no food.

even his slaves. Money, drinks, and cloths are next thrown upon the grave for the *dókpwè*. These gifts are separated into three equal parts, and thereupon the *dokpwégâ* throws water on the grave and himself stamps it down; and when this has been done he returns to the *agô* and asks for drinks and cloths and money for the *dókpwè* who have worked. Whatever is given at this time is confided to the officials of the *dókpwè*, who take it to the house where the grave-digger and the eight strong members of the *dókpwè* who closed the grave await them.

The grave-digger, accompanied by these eight men, now returns to the *agô*, singing a song which recapitulates the events of the death, from the instant after death occurred through every detail of the funeral. The eight young men use their hoes as gongs, striking them with wood to accompany the song, and beat their chests rhythmically to make a further accompaniment to the song of the grave-digger. The digger himself, who is dressed as were the members of the *dókpwè* when the corpse was being carried about, dances as he sings, and the knots of his cloth strike against his ears as he dances. He sings:

“Him who lay dead, we have conducted on his way.
 Now we return;
 We have not fought there.
 The words of this song
 That I sing here
 I, Son-of-the-grave-digger,¹ will tell you
 O, son of *Záku gbaye te nokpe to*²
 O, son of *Àtedekù achededjere*³
 O, *Atíkpa kwégbode golo*⁴
 O, *Demádó kwepats ude*
 When we were at the grave we did not dispute . . .”

After this opening, he continues with the recital of the events of the funeral. One man plays the gong and all the others follow his solo recitative with a chorus. He must take care not to omit a single occurrence. If he is remiss, he will endanger his life, for the spirit of the dead is listening, and will be avenged on him for any negligence. To aid him the *légédé* stands beside him and prompts him. Others

¹ Literally, “Son-of-the-male-goat-who-has-put-the-female-goat-in-front.”

² Literally, “Night is falling: the shadows are falling,” the name of a *dokpwégâ*.

³ The name of another *dokpwégâ*.

⁴ The name of a *dokpwégâ*. Literally, “With the wood of any tree one can make a flute.”

⁵ Another name of a *dokpwégâ*, meaning, “The palm tree, can one make a flute of it?”

nearby prompt him as well, that no offense be given by "forgetting the end of a man's life."

By the time the grave-digger is done with his summary it is almost noon, and the *dokpwégǎ* calls on the family to pay the grave-digger so that he may depart. They give him eleven francs, fifty centimes,¹ and seventeen cauries called *yokpō inyi kwé* ("grave-digger-hoe-send-money"). In addition, the family also give him two bottles of drink. The *dokpwégǎ* gives a large mortuary cloth and one *ajokò* to the *lègèdè*, who kneels and cries aloud:

"Grave-digger, a man died. You were called, and you have buried him. All that was needed was given to send away the dead—all. Therefore, we say to you, leave, and we say, do not come here again. Go! Go! Go! Go!"

Whereupon the grave-digger leaves.

The *dokpwégǎ* now asks the family to come and listen to the song of the King. They prepare themselves by taking money and drinks and cloths, and go to listen to the song of King Agongolo. The *dokpwégǎ* opens by saying,

"Agongolo said that after every burial this song is to be sung. Kneel, therefore, and harken to the voice of the King."

The song which is sung by the *dokpwégǎ* and his *dókpwe*, accompanied only by one gong, is as follows:

"If I had money
I should buy drinks to drink.
One for seventy-five centimes.
Son of Xolo, drink.
Let all of you hear-o . . .
To have a pleasant thought,
Yes, yes, yes.²
He who has money
And hoards all for the future
Of him I do not think well.
Remember that *Gbekó*, too, was destroyed.³
In the coffers of the houses of the dead are many drinks.
Had he for whom this was bought drunk of it?
No, no, no, no.
Seller of drinks, give me drinks to drink
For today my head is turning.
I see it: There is no pleasure for the dead.

¹ In the old reckoning, fifty centimes equalled two thousand cauries.

² The preceding lines are repeated before the song proceeds.

³ *Gbekó* was a kingdom that was thought to be invincible. The Dahomeans, however, defeated its forces.

I say: What you eat in this world, the pleasure of it goes with you.

I say: The wives you had, the pleasure you had of them goes with you.

I say: The meat you ate, the pleasure of it goes with you.

I say: The drinks you drank, the pleasure of them goes with you.

I say: The pipe you smoked, the pleasure of it goes with you."

The gong continues alone without stopping, until the next song is begun:

"Adjogbó, my song felicitates you;

The wife of the unsuccessful hunter does not blow into an animal horn.

In life friendship has worth,

Come, let us be distracted.¹

Let us drink to friendship begun in childhood.

Is it a friend with whom one shares drink in a small calabash?

Has the seller of drink drunk of it?

Give me drinks while I am yet alive,

O, Kúdóxù, while in life, say

Friendship has worth.

Come, let us be distracted."

The *dokpwégé* asks the family to "praise" the King for the lesson of his song, and the children thereupon once more offer money, drinks, and cloths. On this occasion, too, all children, from the eldest to the very youngest must contribute.

It is late in the afternoon when the next important ceremony is begun. The mourners go to their houses within the compound and the members of the societies present at the funeral enter the compound walls. They bring an *amási*, a medicine of leaves crushed in water, and they sprinkle the entire compound to disinfect it of the evil that had brought death. A broom, forty-one cauries, and a chicken are used in this ceremony, which is carried out by the *lègèdè*, who with this broom sweeps a little in the corners of the house; were this not done, no one might eat there. Each son-in-law sends forty-one hot dumplings known as *wó*, and soup made of one chicken,² as well as such other dishes as the man desires to furnish his wife. With the food, a bottle of some drink is required. Each presents separately what he has brought, and should a son-in-law fail to provide food at

¹ These four lines are repeated several times, with the second line varied.

² If the wife later divorces her husband, this chicken is counted among the things a husband or fiancé has given.

this time for his wife, she will not return to him after the ceremony. The first friend of the deceased kills a pig, and has a corn meal cake prepared; he, too, brings a bottle of "drink." He may bring other food as well, but the pig is essential. The food is called *ôyó fúfú*, and the entire ceremony, which is called *nu ká nyé 'yí*, is that in which food is "thrown away" onto the ground.

The *dokpwégq* enters the compound, and gives instructions that all the food brought by the sons-in-law and the friend is to be collected. He delegates the *légèdè* to take an empty calabash and in it to place a little of each contribution. This food is taken to the grave. The *ôyó fúfú* and the pig of the best friend are first placed on the grave; the rest of the food is put there afterwards. When this has been done, all the rest of the food contributed is placed near the *dokpwégq* who now calls his *agutagq* and asks him what villages are represented at the funeral. This officer counts them and comes back quickly, whispering the result to his chief. The food is then divided into four parts. The first of these is given to all the *dókpwè* who came from strange villages or from quarters of the city other than that in which the funeral is being held. The second part is for the children of the dead. The third portion, which is equal to that set aside for the children, is for all the friends. The fourth goes to the commanding *dokpwégq* and his suite. This ceremony of presenting, "throwing away," and apportioning the food is not completed until almost midnight.

When all have finished eating, the *dokpwégq* goes to the *agǝ* and orders the funeral drums to play. The participants are now more cheerful, having rested and refreshed themselves with food. It is now that the family makes its greatest expenditure, and the relatives bring everything that they have yet to give, for at this point their presence in the greatest possible number is of highest importance. They go first to the *zèli* of the oldest son. The drummer who is playing the drum ceases and the group about him sing,

"When your father was alive
Was I invited to come here and dance and drum?
What have you not done?
Come, dance all the colors of life
And I will watch you."

The family dances before the *zèli*—infants are carried on the backs of adults so they may join in the dancing. The dancers go seven times around each *zèli* and each member of a mourning group has his first friend behind him. Each friend carries a basket, and as the group dan-

ces around a drum each takes money, bottles of drink and yards of cloth from his basket and throws it at the *zèli*, to be caught by the drummers. The dancing over, the *dokpwégà* makes three piles of what had been given, and takes all of it.

It is now perhaps two o'clock in the morning and the *dokpwégà* instructs the family to be seated. The *agutagà* proclaims it to be the turn of the eldest son to give his gifts, whereupon the eldest son and his best friend come forward, the best friend carries cloths on which proverbs are represented in appliqué designs, and, singing, gives these cloths to his friend as a gift. Then this friend of the eldest son calls upon his own society to "push" him, and they do so. What is given is put aside. Now the oldest son calls his own society to come and "push." This group, holding up their banner, explain what it represents and how, in accordance with the strictures of its symbols, they are fulfilling the vows they have made. Now they give their gifts, and the contribution of each individual in the society is shouted aloud by the *agutagà*. The eldest son on his part gives a piece of velvet, or some other fine cloth to his best friend "to cover his head"; he gives drinks and food to the members of his society, and when he has done this his group and that of his best friend return to make way for the society of the next child. Every son repeats this performance, and, should the number of offspring of the dead man be a large one, this procedure occupies two or three hours.

The husband of the eldest daughter now goes to the *dokpwégà* with fifty centimes,¹ and asks the master of ceremonies to call his wife forward from the family group. When the wife comes he quotes a proverb of his own composition, appropriate to the occasion and gives her a *kasfome*—a mourning cloth—which he tells her to use as a belt during the ensuing three months. He gives money and tells his friends and his society to "push" him. His wife then gives him a fine cloth "to cover his head," money "to wash the cloths of the singers" he has brought, and then asks the members of her society to "push" her. This money is given to the society of the husband; he himself keeps none of it. When the first daughter has finished, the other daughters repeat this ritual with their individual societies beside them. After the daughters, the cousins, uncles and other relatives, each with his society, participate in this orgy of giving.²

¹ Two thousand cauries in pre-conquest times.

² For the details of this ceremony, see the discussion of mutual-aid societies, pp. 251-252.



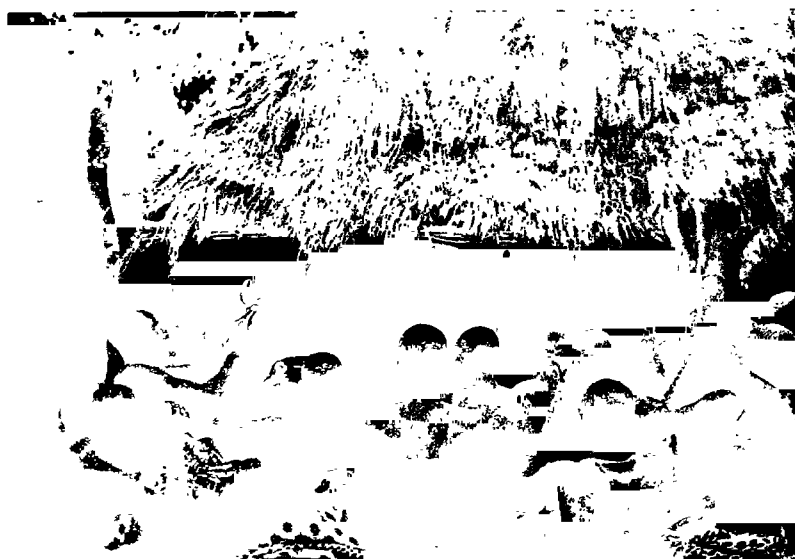
a) The oldest son of a man recently dead, and members of the mourning family.



b) Shaving the head of a mourner.



a) The mourners salute the spirit of the dead.



b) A cock is offered by the Dokpwéga.

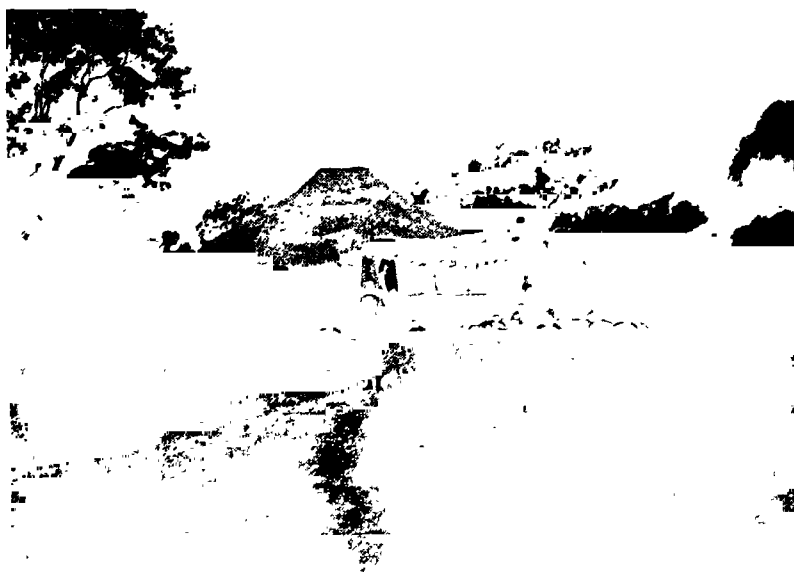


The societies to which the children of the dead belong come to sing songs in honor of the deceased several months after death (Whydah).

Plate 50



a) A country village.



b) The village well.

It is now the turn of the daughters-in-law of the deceased. Each wife gives her husband a large man's cloth, saying this will enable him to change his soiled clothing. She gives him a fine native hat, telling him it is "to cover his head against the cold." She gives soap to wash the cloths her husband wore at the funeral, and also brings a pipe, tobacco and native bamboo tinder (called *dekwé*), to help her husband when he meditates his future course now that his father has left him. She gives him a fine stick and says that since his father is now dead, he must go forth evenings to visit his friends, and must have something with which to kill any snake he may encounter. She says, "An old proverb states: When a man has his father beside him, his wife is the more docile. Do not be troubled, because I will be even more docile than I had been before." She gives him a kerchief, with which he wipes his face, and returns it to her; and smelling it, she says that she now shares the same odor of misfortune as he. She gives him a small drinking calabash, saying that when disaster takes a man unawares, he lets fall the calabash from which he is drinking, and this, therefore, is to replace the one he had dropped. She gives her husband money, saying it is to aid with the expense of providing for the members of his society. She gives dishes of food, asking her husband to offer this food to his friends. Finally, she turns to her own friends who are behind her, and asks them to "push" her. In return, her husband gives her a fine cloth "to cover her head."

It is well after four o'clock in the morning when the wives of the mourning sons have given their presents, and the culminating rite is reached. This may take an hour and a half or it may take four or five hours, depending upon the size of the family and the dead man's resources. Though it might seem as though an end of giving had been reached, it was again remarked, "Here is where they spend most of all." Each *dókpwè* has a special group of singers of funeral songs called *dògbwléhwé djito* ("death-spoiled-house sing-men"), "those who sing funeral songs," and special dancers who dance the *dògbwléhwé dudu*, ("death-spoiled-house dances"), "funeral dances." As each *dókpwè* sings its songs, the mourners shower them with gifts, and, after each chorus has finished its song, the *agutagá* cries out the name of each giver and the amount he has given. The *dokpwéyá* instructs that the number of *zéli* be counted and a sum of money which corresponds to the number of drums present, as well as a bottle of drink for each group accompanying one of these funeral drums, must be provided. This ceremonial is called *zéli nyí íy* (drums-send-back), "to stop the drums,".

and the *zeli* stop playing, though it is not yet time for them to be taken away. The *dokpwégq* takes his place under his parasol of state. By this time he is tired, and as too often happens, so drunk that he is incapable of guarding his possessions, whereupon his assistants steal from him, "for he has had too much." However, he gives instructions to bring all the gifts that were given for the *dókpwe*. The men who get the first cloths are counted and he takes two cauries for each. The *dokpwégq agúnq*, who commands the ceremony, receives two cauries, the *dokpwégq agúsà*, his assistant, the *meádedè*, the visiting *dokpwégq*, the *agutagq*, the crier, the *agqmakpótó*, the one who watches over the *agq*, and the *enuxlétó*, the one who exhibits the cloths, are also given two cauries each. This division is called *agqfó*, and when it is finished, two large mortuary cloths are sent for the *dokpwé gbónúgq*, the secular chief, appointed by the King over all the *dokpwégq*. These cloths are said to be for Dadá, the King. The *dokpwégq* then speaks,

"Now I leave you in peace. I am going home, and I shall never return for so evil a purpose. The day of the funeral is not a good one." He says that he will come the next day for the three subsidiary ceremonies which must follow a funeral; the *kodédō 'kodji* ("lighten the sand over him who is buried"); *yàxóxò* ("polishing the grave"), and *alítási* ("show the dead the route across the water"). Thereupon the *dokpwégq* leaves, the family retire to the compound, and the definitive burial is over. Mourning, however, is not ended, and all sleep there. The time has not yet come for the daughters to be returned to their husbands.

On returning to his home, the *dokpwégq* divides the cloths and other gifts with his followers. This ceremony of apportionment is termed *nudásámè* ("thing-put-before-man"). When the division is made the large cloth goes first for the *dokpwégq* himself, for as has been said before, a *medaxò*, an important man, must not come with empty hands. However, the *dokpwégq* says it is difficult for him to stand, so he is given a cloth to help him lift his feet. He says his limbs hurt and they give him a cloth to support his limbs. After this he takes whatever of the gifts he wishes for himself, and then directs the *lègèdè*, the *asúka*, and the *agutagq*, his subordinates, to divide the remainder among the members of the *dókpwe*. This is a long process, however, for "they divide until they fight." When the division is finished, the *dokpwégq* levies a sum to be used in replacing drums, gongs, and other ceremonial objects of the *dókpwe*; then, instructing his officials to meet him at the place of mourning at the time fixed by him for the subsidiary ceremonies, he directs the *dókpwe* to disband.

Chapter XXI

THE MOURNING PERIOD

With the return of the *dokpwégq* and his followers to their homes, and the dispersal of all other participants not residing in the compound who have been in attendance on the funeral rites, the burial of the dead compound-head is completed. This does not imply that there are no subsidiary ceremonies needed to make sure that his journey to the world of the dead will be a good one, and to establish his position among those who have preceded him there. Nor yet does this imply for his family that their period of separation from the community, and of mourning for the dead, is over. Any recital of the ceremonies attendant upon death, therefore, must take cognizance of these later rites.

The day following the departure of the *dokpwégq* is a period of rest for the mourners and their friends. On the evening of that day, however, the *dokpwégq* returns to take his place, for the wake, termed *djñō tutō* ("come-sleep") is now to be held. The many funerary drums that have played at the burial ceremonies are reassembled, and many young people from all parts of the city, or of surrounding villages, should the compound be a rural one, come to participate in this social occasion. Once again the mourning family is put to no inconsiderable expense to provide refreshments for those present. Throughout the night, and until an hour or two before dawn, there is drinking and dancing and singing. Tales are recounted dealing with themes of the broadest sexual innuendo, for the native view is that this is the time to amuse the dead, for to moralize to a dead person is both indelicate and senseless. Games are played—*adjī*¹ and cards, the latter for stakes. In pre-conquest times, when cards were unknown, the gambling game played with caury-shells called *akō* took the place of cards. Legend relates how, at one funeral, a son of King Gezo played for such high stakes that he lost his entire compound, and his father had to redeem it by paying twenty thousand sacks of cauries.

¹ See above, p. 287.

At the end of this period of dancing, gaming and merriment, the drumming is silenced, and all go to the grave. Two pieces of calabash and forty-one caury-shells are taken there. The *dokpwégè* uses the bits of gourd to dig a small hole in the center of the covered grave, and places these cauries in this hole. Each of the children of the dead add forty-one cauries to those put into the hole by the *dokpwégè*, and when this is done, the hole is closed and the pieces of calabash are buried nearby. This ceremony, called *kodido kodji* ("sand-raise-on-dead"), expresses the idea that this causes the earth to lie lightly upon the body. At this point the forty-one songs called *yótáyá* ("grave-head-songs") are sung. These are held to be so sacred that the singing of them is fraught with danger, so that only those spiritually equipped may sing them, and this only on the proper occasion.¹

When this cycle of songs comes to a close, two chicks, a cock and a hen, two small pots, twice forty-one cauries, one calabash of water, and some drink—anything but water—are supplied for the next ceremony, called *zéhwi xwé* ("pottery-plant")—"putting the small pot on the grave." A piece of wood called *akpákpò*, used in daily life to polish the floor of a house, is also brought. The wood and the chickens are held in one hand and the grave is struck with them. The *akvè*, the *dokpwégè* and the family accompanied by a gong, sing:

"An old woman weeps
Amidst the leaves;
A white-haired woman-o
Weeps amidst the leaves of the forest.
And she says, the birds in the bush,
The life of these birds is to be envied.
How it is that man born into life has no more generations?
He has no more."²

This is followed by another song:

"To begin a pot
Is it the same as to finish it?
To die and leave life is not good.
Death chooses badly;
He who killed you must have an avenger."

¹ So strong is this feeling that not only was it impossible to obtain recordings of the music or recital of the words of these songs, but even mention of them was made with the greatest caution.

² The explanation of this song is that the old woman deplores the fate of man who, when he reaches a given age, loses many of his age group. The birds of the forest who breed more frequently, breed more "generations"; this would be particularly true of long-lived birds.

This is followed by another song, of which no explanation as to symbolism dared be given.¹

"An old woman was burned in the bush.
Oh singer, son of a singer, do not hide.
The great sun lights the whole universe
And I, myself, do not hide, *kukú hukwí*."

After this song comes:

"Give water for him to drink
A drinker of water is dead.²
Give drink for him to drink
For a drinker who drinks is dead.²
Give tobacco,
That someone may smoke it for him,
For a smoker of tobacco is dead.
Give a woman,
That someone may lie with her,
For a lover of women is dead.
Give a gun to discharge for him
For a warrior is dead, *kukú hukwí*."

All that the song names is given by the family. The *dokpwégé* takes what is given and enacts, or delegates someone else to act for him, all those things recited in the song.³

This ceremony occupies several hours, with the principal officiating rôle held by the *akwí*, who sings one refrain after another, until an hour or two after sunrise. She then authorizes the children of the dead, in the name of the sib-head, to bathe with soap, to shave their heads, and to put on clean clothes. This washing and shaving of the head occupies the rest of the day, for all members of the family including even the smallest of infants are shaved. At this time all the clothes used during the funeral are washed, while the hair is thrown

¹ While this song was being sung, all those who were present, other than the singer, held their hands to their ears. The singer himself not only sprinkled rum in three places on the floor as an offering before he would sing the song, but at the end of the day's discussion sent the remaining contents of the bottle to the *dokpwégé* for further ceremonies of purification.

² These two lines are repeated.

³ Whether or not the *dokpwégé*, or his representative, actually has intercourse over the grave with a woman given for the purpose was disputed. One informant stated that this is done. Another, however, denied it, and said that one of the daughters of the dead is brought forward, but is redeemed from the *dokpwégé* by a gift. This second person stated that in the days of the kingdom a young female slave might be provided, and with this girl the *dokpwégé* or his representative would have sex relations on the grave. The song seems to cause a great deal of sexual excitation in the listeners, occasionally even to the point of sexual license. However, this is never indulged in by the members of the mourning family.

on the refuse heap behind the compound. These purificatory acts permit the mourners once more to procure and cook their own food.

The cleansing finished, the family gives a closed calabash, millet flour, two cauries, two chickens and beverages, which the *akovi*, accompanied by the mourners, takes to the house of the dead man. She removes the cover from this calabash, and asks for leaves of the *désilísigè* bush. When they are gathered and brought to her, she places them on the ground, and, taking the two cauries, she asks for the true name of the dead. This is whispered in her ear by a brother of the dead or by his eldest son, and she in turn whispers it to the two cauries which she throws on the leaves, covering them instantly with the calabash. She rises, and holding some water in the palm of one hand, she puts millet flour with the other in the top of the calabash held by the *lègèdè*, and as she does so sprinkles the water on top of it. Once again she calls the name of the dead man, and sprinkles the caury-shells with water; the *lègèdè* sprinkles them with the mixture of water and millet flour called *djasɛ*; the *asúka*, with a bottle of liquor; and he is followed in this act by the family. The *akovi* next gives food to the dead, first putting down beans near the calabash; then the calabash is sprinkled with the blood of two chickens, a cock and a hen, and the broth from these is added to what has been poured over the cauries to which the name of the man has been confided. This done, the *akovi* is ready to return to her home. Before she leaves, however, she blesses the children and the women of the household, and promises never to come to this house again on a similar errand. The following day the *asúka* returns to remove the calabash containing the caury-shells, which had been allowed to lie undisturbed on the ground, and carrying it to his house, he keeps it for three months before disposing of it.

The mourners must now go forth on a round of visits to the first friend of the dead, and to all those who made gifts at the funeral. They go in a group, so that not infrequently these callers form a procession of perhaps forty, fifty, or even seventy or more individuals. For three months the mourning colors, black or indigo blue, are worn by all members of the collectivity in which the dead had resided—sons and daughters, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and daughters-in-law, the women always wearing a black scarf tied about the waist. A person who failed to do this would brave the resentment of the ghost, with the most drastic possibility of death to such a one, as would the sons, daughters, and wives of the dead if they attempted sexual

relationship.¹ During this period of mourning the sib-head and other elderly relatives give some thought to the matter of the distribution of the property of the dead man, though this subject is not brought into open discussion until later.

After three months, the *dokpwégq* once more returns to the compound, where arriving some hours before daybreak—because “the lizard must not yet have stirred when this ceremony is finished, nor must the sun have risen, nor the flies be about”—he tells the family to prepare to discard mourning. With his own hands he removes the black bands of the women, and places these in a large kerchief supplied him by the eldest son, to which each woman relieved of her mourning band adds cauries—all these are for himself. Before leaving, he receives food cooked in preparation for his coming, and of this he takes a little of each dish and drops some of it on three piles of sand, on the first symbolically feeding the spirits of all the dead men of the family, on the second the spirits of the women, and on the third the ghost of the man whose period of mourning is just over.

Now the *tqsinp*, one of the oldest *akovi* of the collectivity, who makes the sacrifices at the altars of the family dead, comes forward to consecrate the new *asê*—an iron standard which serves as an altar for the dead. Taking this into the *dexóxô* house where food is offered to the ancestral spirits, she is given great quantities of food—chickens, goats, beverages, vegetables, corn flour, and whatever else may have been bought for the occasion. As the animals are sacrificed, the earlier dead are asked to “welcome” the one recently deceased, and to accord his soul a place among the *tvody*—the deified family ancestral spirits—though this last comer is not as yet deified. One-half of the food, of the drinks and of the animals killed is sent to the *dokpwégq*; the rest is eaten by the family.

The night preceding the ceremonial which closes the period of mourning, the *akovi*, the *dokpwégq* and a small escort go to the nearest juncture of three roads. She is entirely enveloped in a long cloth, and carries a small pot, some drink, a white cloth, and a young chick a day old “which does not know its father or mother.” Whistling the low whistle that summons the spirits of the dead, she calls the names

¹ The time of mourning, which is three months in Abomey, varies in other regions of Dahomey. One ceremony for the termination of mourning which was witnessed in Whydah occurred almost a year after the death of the person being honored. At Peda, another district of Dahomey, in olden times the wives of the deceased used to mourn for three years. During all of the first year they were not allowed to bathe, and for the last two might wear no new clothes.

of those who are to come to the ceremonial which is to follow. Those who accompanied the two principals in this rite face the village from which they came, for to look toward the *akovi* would mean seeing the dead appear and, therefore, death. The spirits of those men of the family whose names are unknown are first invited; then the spirits of the women whose names have been forgotten; then those who died of small-pox; those killed by lightning; those who died away from home where their deaths could not be known.¹

Finally, the souls of specific individuals are called to come on the morrow to receive their goats, for this is a time when friends of the one most recently dead may send offerings of goats to their own relatives. The case may be taken of a family where a head of a compound had died. His children were dispersed; some perhaps had gone to Nigeria, others equally far away, so that it was impossible to get them together for this ceremony of arranging a welcoming of the newly dead by the spirits of the other family dead. All that was possible to be done in the way of funeral ceremonies was done, but this particular ceremony was left in abeyance. Let us suppose that another man of this same status in the same family died. Again his relatives could not be brought together; and this may have continued for ten or fifteen years. The dead, like all supernatural beings, have human attributes; they can be reasoned with, but when their patience is at an end they will seek to punish the family. In this instance the punishment may have taken the form of deaths in childbirth, excessive infant mortality, loss of crops, destruction of homes, illnesses, or other disasters. Fate, through the diviner, has declared that the spirits of these "unwelcomed" dead are causing the trouble. In this ceremony the sacrifices and the proper messages may be sent to these offended spirits.

The morning after the *akovi* returns from her ceremony, a round hut roofed with a covering that comes to a point is built for the deceased head of the compound in whose honor the ceremony is being performed. If the status of the deceased was of sufficient importance, this house may be built of wood and be large enough to permit a person to enter it. If, however, the dead man was head of a compound of minor importance, then the house is much smaller and permits a man standing beside it to hold the sacrifice over it. For ordinary persons, such a

¹ In any ritual which has for its purpose the temporary bringing of the spirits of the dead back to this world, these five classes must be called before individual spirits may be summoned.

house is made of mats. Beside the principal hut, and to the left of it, are five small ones of matting, built for the five classes of ancestral spirits that were called the preceding evening. To the right of the principal hut are those for the spirits of the dead who have been specifically called the night before to receive the delayed sacrifice of a goat. A large native jar is inverted beside the tallest house, and the eldest son of the deceased clammers onto this, and from it climbs to the top of the house. Standing on the conical roof he slaughters the goat, and the blood is allowed to fall on the roof, which is so constructed that the blood trickles into the house itself. For each house of mats a goat is sacrificed; a male for the spirits of men, a female for the spirits of women; a black goat for the spirits of those who have died of small-pox; a white one for those killed by lightning; for the others, an animal of any color. After the goat has been killed by the eldest son of the deceased, a member of the local *dókpwè*, who acts for the best friend of the dead man, slaughters a second animal. Next the eldest sons of all those persons whose spirits have not yet received a goat, each stand before the respective small houses, and holding the animals over the roofs, kill them and allow the blood to fall inside the houses.

When this is completed, the *akovi* formally instructs the people not to look at her as she stands nude outside the gateway of the compound where she washes and ritually cleanses herself with hot water. All shut their eyes, for to see her at this time would mean death. Returning clothed, she announces "cock crow," that all who are present may "awaken." The small round huts may now be broken down, and the debris placed near the entrance to the compound and burned.

On the same day the mourners go to the head of their sib, who is to consider the man to replace the dead, and the ceremony, called *ká tútú*, of naming the heir, which has been described above,¹ takes place. When the successor has been chosen, he takes a goat, a bullock, twenty chickens, if he can afford this many, or, if not, as many as he can provide, and performs the ceremony termed *xwetádé* ("year-head-ceremony-for-ancestor"), in which a roof is erected over the grave of the one whom he has succeeded. This ceremony must last at least two days, though where the dead was a man of importance and wealth, it may last even ten days. Its purpose is to give food to the spirits of the dead family-heads and to furnish pleasure

¹ See pp. 88ff.

to the living. If the head of a collectivity does not perform this ceremony every thirteen months,¹ it is believed that he will die. If he fails and survives, he will, in any event, be replaced by the sib-head, because it is held that "he is eating the ancestral palm-trees"—diverting revenues intended for this rite. The ceremony is followed by a visit to a diviner, where the further rite of "cutting the tongue of the dead" is held. The purpose of this is to make it possible for the dead to speak in the land of the spirits, for it is thought that if the tongue is not "cut," the dead can make only the inarticulate sounds of a mute, and will not be understood by those there. With this rite are finally discharged the obligations of the family toward the deceased, and the mourning rituals are ended.

As indicated, the funeral ceremonies described are those which the Dahomean terms the "basic" type. There are large numbers of variants, however, depending principally upon the age, sex, and status of the dead, as well as on the manner of death. It will be remembered that the funeral which has been detailed is that of a man well along in years, the head of an important compound or of a collectivity, of substantial economic position, with a considerable family. In the case of a woman of similar age, who had borne children, the funeral would differ in no essential except that the children being fewer, the gifts would not be as numerous as in the funeral described above. If a man died before he had succeeded to the headship of a compound, his funeral, too, would be less lavish. On the other hand, if the dead had been a village chief, or head of a district, if he had held an important political office, or, above all, if he had been a member of the royal family, the display and the consumption of wealth would far surpass what has been described. The funeral of the King in pre-conquest times was, of course, in a category by itself, and involved the destruction of large numbers of slaves, to say nothing of those members of his harem who were buried with him to accompany his spirit into the next world. Indeed, in addition to slaves and wives, every profession gave a representative, every village and district a man and woman, so that the entourage of the King in the next world might reproduce in miniature the population of the kingdom which he had ruled while alive.²

¹ That is, every year, since the Dahomean counts both ends of a series.

² Le Herissé (pp. 178ff.), gives a brief account of the death and funeral of Glele. The funerals of royalty show a significant departure from the usual procedure, since here the ordinary *dokpwegè* is replaced by an officiant named the *tavisà*, who is aided by four assistants termed *kpákpá*, *nevò*, *tífà*, and *adjérunu*.

It is not difficult to see from the preceding paragraph that age is an important factor in dictating the character of a funeral. In the case of an adult, the older a man or woman, the more consolidated his social position and the more relatives and friends he will have, to the end that a greater display can be made at his burial. A very young child has practically no funeral at all. If a child has not lived long enough to cut a few teeth, then the body, covered with banana leaves, is merely taken out and buried. If at the time of death a child is already in possession of some of its deciduous teeth, then a goat or a ram is killed as a sacrifice to the ancestors, and the child is buried in a cloth. The ceremony is very simple, however, and occurs on the day of death. For a child who has almost attained the age of adolescence, two or three cloths are given. There is slightly more ceremonial, but in this case also, burial is achieved on the day of death. To merit the burial rites of an adult, a man must have attained the age of about twenty years, and a young woman the time "when she may be married."

The explanation for this gradual increase in the complexity of the ceremonial with age lies, however, quite as much in the field of religion as in that of economics. The extent to which a person has position and power during his lifetime is indicative, in fact, of the power his spirit is held to exert after his death. As will be seen when the beliefs concerning the soul are discussed, this concept is carried to a logical conclusion by the Dahomeans, who hold that the soul of a baby is so weak as to be almost non-existent, and that the power of a soul does not develop fully until the person who possesses it has attained adulthood. It is clear, therefore, why the logic of this demand permits the Dahomean to escape the heavy drain on his resources in the burial of a young child; and it can be seen how both economic and religious concepts interplay in making for this alignment of custom.

Should a child or adult die while either or both parents are still living, the funeral ceremonies go on without the parents in attendance. The reason for this is the feeling that children should live to attend the funerals of their fathers and mothers, and that it is an indignity for a parent to witness the burial rites of his own child. The gods, it is said never send children into the world without intending them to bury their parents, and therefore, a child whose death precedes that of its father or mother is not a real child. Toward the expense of such a ceremony the parents contribute nothing. All the costs of preparation

and carrying through the ritual are borne by the brothers and sisters of the dead, though they may be aided by the brothers and sisters of the parents of the dead. Even though the parents do not contribute so much as a cloth to the funeral ceremony, they do however, give money to enable the soul of the child to "cross the river"; that is, to get to the land of the dead.¹ The parents also refrain from going through the rites of mourning, and usage demands that they make no show of grief. During the funeral itself, the father and mother remain in their house, and several friends stay with them to help them to simulate indifference. In reality they do weep, but restrainedly, so that the ancestors may not be angered and bring this calamity upon them again. If a son had lived in the same house with his father, the corpse is either taken to another house within the compound, and the grave dug there, or the father goes to another house. The parents, however, do not leave the compound while the funeral rites of their child are being carried on.

Other facts than those already mentioned may determine the form which the funeral of a given person may take. Thus if a man were a wanderer, and died too far away from home to permit the transportation of the body to his own compound, the actual burial is conducted by some members of his family sent for the purpose to the place where he had died. They do not fail to bring the hair and nail-clippings of their dead relative on their return, for then the body of the deceased is simulated by a cloth rolled in a mat and the funeral rites proceed, the hair and nail-clippings being buried in place of the body.² If a person is a member of one of the religious cults, the ceremonies of burial also differ in the sense that they are made more complex by rituals, conducted by the cult priest and co-initiates, that precede the burial ceremonies under family auspices. The ritual by means of which a person is separated from his god will be considered when the religious rites of the Dahomeans are described.³ However, it may be stated here that on the death of such a person no one other than the chief-priest and fellow-members of his own and other cult groups may see the body immediately after death. It is they who wash the body, they who shave it and clip the nails, they who clothe the body. Not until the rites of purification and the ceremonial of "taking the god from the

¹ See below, vol. ii, pp. 239ff.

² If death has occurred in a place so far distant that no one can attend the actual burial, and if hair and nail-clippings are not obtainable, the rites are carried out without them.

³ See below, vol. ii, pp. 194-198.

head" of the person to whom in life it was accustomed to come are held, are the family permitted to have the corpse, and to proceed with the customary funeral rites.

The manner of death must also be considered in discussing funeral types.¹ Suicides are accorded special treatment, though suicide is not looked upon with the horror with which untimely death caused by supernatural agencies is regarded.² A Dahomean suicide is buried with cloths, and some gifts are given at the funeral. However, the rites of burial in this case are quiet, and the funeral is small. A special case, applicable only to the coastal Dahomeans, has to do with those who are drowned in the lagoons. When this occurs the family go to the lagoon and call the man for perhaps half an hour, continuing to call his name while they return to his house. A statuette is then made and a small cloth is put over it, after which a large funeral is held. Every night during the first year after death, the family go to the shore of the lagoon and light a fire, for it is said that the dead man cries at night that he is cold.

A death by drowning is not dishonorable, but the cases which are to be described below are without honor, and necessitate special precautions. One of these, more dangerous politically than spiritually is the case of the death of a man executed for killing another. The same would have obtained in pre-conquest times for a man executed by the King for, let us say, seducing a wife of the royal master. For such deaths, a statuette is made and a secret funeral is given, so that the soul of the dead may not be lost to the family.

The relationship between small-pox and the cult of the Earth deities will be explained later.³ However, it may be said here that small-pox is believed to be sent as a punishment for grave offences in the eyes of these deities, and it is taken to indicate that either the dead himself or a member of his family had committed some heinous crime such as the practice of black magic. A person who dies of small-pox may only be buried after permission has been given by the chief-priest of the Earth cult. Not an ordinary *dokpwégã*, but a special

¹ Cf. Le Herissé, pp. 163-164.⁹

² The attitude of the Dahomeans toward suicide was indicated in the comments of natives at the suicide of a European, which occurred in the village of Bohicon near Abomey, during the time when this field work was being conducted. Their reaction was that suicide, though a cowardly thing, is a man's personal concern, since it does not affect others. While generally looked upon with disapproval, there are times—when, for example, a man is in the hands of the enemy—when suicide is even an admirable act.

³ See below, vol. ii, pp. 135-136.

functionary who has control of powerful magic conducts the funeral, which is carried out by a small *dókpwe* composed of a few trained and magically protected men. There is no ceremonial, and burial is effected the day of death. After a period of at least seven months, though not more than three years, and after consultation with the diviner, the priests of the Earth are approached to name the ransom for the return of the soul of the dead to the family. The recovered soul is appeased at this time by a funeral conducted with a simulacrum of the corpse, consisting of a wooden statuette rolled in cloths and mats. Many charms are placed on it and it is then quickly buried, with the soul being thus reclaimed by its sib.

It was difficult to determine whether or not the special type of burial given the body of one who has died of leprosy is to be explained by fear of the disease, or by the fact that, as in the case of small-pox, leprosy was held to be a form of punishment meted out by the Earth gods. Both points of view were advanced. Whatever the case, a leper is buried without ceremony, the body, otherwise unclothed, being wrapped in straw. That it may be that fear of contagion by disease rather than of vengeance by supernatural powers dictates this process is indicated by the fact that no mention was made of "purchasing the soul" of a deceased leper from the priests of the Earth cult. However, sometime between seven months and three years after death the diviner is consulted and a funeral is given. In this case also, either a statuette or a folded cloth placed inside a mat represents the body of the deceased.

If a person is killed by lightning, he, too, stands convicted by this fact of some grave crime which has incurred the displeasure of the gods of the Thunder pantheon. A person so killed is never buried by his family, but the body is turned over to the chief-priest and cult-members of these deities. It is believed that a man killed in this fashion remains upright until the chief-priest questions him, and forces him to confess the crimes he had committed to be so punished. No one touches any of the belongings of such a man, not even his money. The house in which he lived is allowed to go to ruin, an *azq̃* of palm-fronds being placed about it to guard against anyone entering it. The movable property of such a man, his money, his cloths, his stools, and his dishes, are thrown away at the cross-roads. The chief-priest may take some of the money if he likes, to be applied to the expenses of ceremonies for the Thunder gods, but the other belongings are left to rot where they have been thrown. The body is placed on

a rack built in the bush and a fire is made under it.¹ Should anyone have the temerity to touch the belongings of a person killed by lightning, it is believed that this person will in turn pay for this by being struck with a bolt. After consultation with the diviner, in this case as in that of a person who has died of small-pox, the family negotiate with the chief of the Thunder priesthood for the repurchase of the soul of their deceased relative. When the negotiations are completed, a statuette is made to represent the deceased and a funeral is held, but this is done so quietly that no one outside the immediate family knows of it.²

Perhaps the most terrible death of all those envisaged by the Dahomeans is that of a woman in childbirth. This was tragically illustrated in the case of the daughter of the chief-priestess of the Sky cult, who died in childbirth shortly after the long ceremonies which attended the issuing forth of the novitiates from the cult-house. The death was regarded as the more disastrous because of the fact that had the accouchement been successful, the woman would have been delivered of twins. A great change came over the chief-priestess in but a few hours, making her look haggard and old, yet she wore no mourning, and the death, when it was spoken of at all, was mentioned in whispers. The routine of the shrine went on as usual, but rumors began to be heard.³ It was said, among other things, that not all the sheep that had been intended for the sacrifice to the great gods of the Sky had been devoted to their destined end, but had been taken by some of the attendant priests. And while it was considered that the chief-priestess was guiltless, the rigid Dahomean rule of holding those in command to ultimate responsibility applied, and thus it was she who was made to suffer for her lack of vigilance. It must not be thought, however, that it is only the Sky gods who bring about such calamity. Any deity may cause a woman to die in this manner, and it is believed that in most instances, death in childbirth is brought

¹ Whether or not the body is thus left depends on the region of Dahomey that is being considered. Near a village in Adjā, the western portion of Dahomey, a shrine of the Thunder gods was visited where the skulls, mandibles and long bones of those who had been killed by lightning were preserved. It was very dark inside the shrine, a darkness accentuated by the lowering clouds and gloom of a day in the rainy season, but it seemed that there could not have been less than fifty skulls in the hut. See below, vol. ii, pp. 167-168, for a description of this shrine.

² There was sharp disagreement as to whether the soul of a person killed by lightning might be ransomed and reclaimed by the family of the one punished in this manner.

³ As will be seen in the discussion of religion, the twin-cult is under the special protection of Mawû, herself a twin, and the mother of twins.

about because a woman who has been unfaithful to her husband refuses to confess the name of the real father of the child whose birth is being impeded.

When such a death occurs the abdomen of the corpse is opened and after the body of the child has been removed, mother and child are buried in the bush. No cloths, no food, no drink, no money is given; the bodies are not even wrapped in leaves but are interred entirely nude. People of other compounds do not come to the house where the woman died, and if anyone should mention the death, those about shut their eyes and ears and say they do not want to hear of it. No one will touch anything that belonged to the woman. Her possessions are divided among the men who carry the body to its dishonored grave, and these same men make sacrifices in the room where death had occurred so that it may be used again. At the time of the family funeral customs, or those for the ancestors, the woman's name is omitted, and if invoked, she is classed with those who had "fallen in war," that is, had met unnatural death. Indeed, men who could be prevailed upon to speak of the manner of burial of a person who had died in childbirth showed the greatest reluctance to do so, while women manifested abject fear when the subject was but mentioned in the most circumspect way.¹ However, even in the case of a woman who has died in childbirth, the soul is reclaimed before three years have elapsed. The fingernails and hair which have been kept are wrapped in a mat and buried at a quiet funeral.

This brings us to an attempt to explain the significance to the Dahomeans of their burial rites. As is evident when the discussion of the ancestral cult is recalled, it is of the utmost importance to the Dahomean that a good life in eternity be assured him.² A splendid funeral is only one of the means of attaining this. Another is to see to it during his own lifetime that his soul is not "stolen" by the powerful spirits which lie in wait for the dissatisfied spirits of men who have not properly served their souls, with the result that not only their lives, but also their wealth is lost them, and their souls are placed in servitude to others. There is the further precaution against evil magic; against those sorcerers who can steal the soul of a man and enslave it to the end that they may accomplish their own evil purposes. Thus

¹ It is for this reason that no more detailed descriptions of the burials for these abnormal, dishonorable types were obtained. The Dahomean has the feeling that to speak of these matters is to endanger the speaker, and to invite death.

² See above, pp. 194ff.

this drive to ensure a permanent existence in the hereafter to one's soul, and to the surviving generations the use of that soul to multiply its kin,¹ makes for the formation of a complex of beliefs which furnish powerful motivation for the elaborateness of the Dahomean funeral.

This, however, is not the entire explanation, for with it must be allied another that lies to a great extent in the economic sphere, one that has already been indicated as a powerful motivating force in Dahomean life. To obtain prestige in the eyes of one's fellow-men is a compelling drive that may be termed a universal in human experience. In Dahomean culture, the surest way of obtaining prestige for oneself and one's family is through the conspicuous consumption which lies at the very core of the funeral ceremony. It will be remembered how important is the rôle of the crier at the funeral ceremonies; how, indeed, there are so many announcements to be made that not one but a number of criers must be at hand. The significant thing is that the announcements made by the crier are, in overwaelming proportion, declarations of the individual contributions made. Thus it is that a man strains every effort to marry more wives, to have more children, and to marry his children advantageously so that, at his funeral, he will have many children and grand-children who in turn have many friends, and represent membership in many societies.

If the question be asked why a man should strive for this at his own funeral, after he himself will have ceased to live, the answer is a two-fold one. In the first place there is the pull of tradition, for at the funeral of a man's own father he has seen how much his own position was influenced by the number and kind of gifts that were given, and he knows that his children's social position will be affected by the character of his own funeral. He knows, too, that while still alive he will have honor because people will say of him: "He will have a great funeral!" The second point to be remembered is that in death, just as in life, the position of a man is assured considerably by the extent to which his pecuniary standing is high. The way to attain such standing in the world of the dead, then, is by means of an elaborate funeral, for the more that is given, the more a man's possessions in the next world.²

¹ See the discussion of the Dahomean soul-concept below, especially vol. II, pp. 232-233.

² A similar interpretation of the elaborateness of the funeral ceremonies, with greater emphasis on its religious than on its economic phases, however, is offered by Le Herissé, pp. 159-160.

The Dahomean funeral thus furnishes a point of contact between many aspects of Dahomean life. It is a veritable climax to the life of the individual; the source from which the ancestral cult arises and the sib maintains its supply of souls for future generations. Because of the expenditure of food, money, and materials which it entails, it is connected with the economic life of Dahomey. Indeed, it may be said to be one of the focal institutions which leads to an integrated understanding of Dahomean culture.

